

# **Fairbury History Stories Volume 1**

by

Dale C. Maley

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Fairbury History Stories Volume 1  
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## **Warning-Disclaimer**

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## **Foreword**

The first settlers in the Fairbury area was Major Darnell south of town in 1829 and the McDowells north of town in 1832. In 1857, the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad installed new tracks which helped to create the village of Fairbury.

This book is a collection of over 70 different carefully researched stories about various aspects of Fairbury history. These stories run the range from the pioneer settlers to modern efforts to preserve Fairbury history.

It is hoped this book will help people better understand the almost 200 years of rich history that helped to define the community of Fairbury.

## **Acknowledgments**

Many thanks go to the Dominy Memorial Library for digitizing the Blade newspaper and making it available online. These archives are the primary source of information for these Fairbury history stories.

Thanks also go to the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Their collection was often used to research and to develop these Fairbury history stories.

Thanks also go to Diane Pawlowski for her assistance in researching the many topics covered in this book

Many thanks also go to Judith K. Wells for proofreading the manuscript.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Book Design**

The author began writing Fairbury history stories for the Blade newspaper in 2018. A maximum limit of 1,000 words were placed on these articles by the publisher. There was a limit of two photographs or images per article. The vast majority of the articles only used one image to accompany each article.

With the 1,000 word limit, it was impractical to specifically cite each reference source that was used for every article. If the source was the Blade or the Pantagraph, the author often cited the publication and what year the article was found.

For this book, the text that was used in the original Blade article was repeated in this book. If more photographs or images are available for an article, they were added to the content of this book.

### **Errors**

The author has made every attempt to be as accurate as possible with the data used in this book. Some of this data came from Ancestry.com. The danger of using data from Ancestry.com is that it is often not verifiable to a source document.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **A Truly Larger than Life Figure**

Christian Ziller was a native of Pennsylvania. Sometime before 1862, he and his wife Anna Louisa Henry moved from Pennsylvania to Weston, Illinois. In 1862, they had a son named William Henry Ziller. William married Almira Busby, and they had four children.

One of William and Almira's children was a son named George William Ziller. He was born in 1899 in Weston, Illinois. George W. Ziller would grow to be a mountain of a man with a height of six feet six and a weight of 525 pounds. George Ziller's father died in 1903 at the age of only forty-one years old. George's mother became a widow and had to raise four young children in Weston.

In September of 1918, George enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in the heavy artillery section. He was honorably discharged four months later in January of 1919. After the war, he resumed his job at Ziller Motors in Pontiac. George started wrestling in Fairbury in 1919. He would wrestle all challengers at the Fairbury Fair. In 1921, George Ziller was selling the Lexington brand of automobiles in Richmond, Indiana.

Sometime before 1926, George went out west. He met and married Rachel "Rae" Grace Overman. She was born in 1902 in California and died in 1984 in Nevada. Many newspapers reported she was a small woman who weighed less than 100 pounds.

George's first recorded brush with the law occurred in 1926 in Los Angeles. When police officers found that George would not fit into their police car, they had to requisition a special truck to transport him to the jail. They discovered that Ziller was six feet six inches tall and weighed 606 pounds. He was charged with two counts of grand larceny and two counts of embezzlement. Mr. D. S. Yoder alleged that he hired George Ziller to collect a \$2,000 debt owed to him. Mr. Ziller collected the debt money but kept it for himself instead of returning it to Mr. Yoder. When officials determined that George would not fit into a jail cell, they released him immediately on bond.

In 1927, George was arrested again in Los Angeles for impersonating a Department of Justice agent in Granite City, Illinois. George defrauded W. W. Camp of a small amount of money by the asserted impersonation. He was arrested in Los Angeles, then transported back to Illinois for trial.

George then moved from Los Angeles to Reno, Nevada. The Nevada State Journal newspaper reported that George W. "Jack" Ziller was a 538-pound man who operated a stock exchange dealing with mining securities in Reno during the early 1930s. He ran his stock exchange in the Odd Fellows building and later in the Golden Hotel. He was arrested for disturbing the peace in Reno. In 1934, George W. Ziller declared bankruptcy in Reno, Nevada. His bankruptcy notice recounted that stockbroker Ziller had debts of \$119,641 and his assets were \$69,789.

In the 1940 U.S. Census, George and his wife were living in Fairbury, Illinois. Current Fairbury citizens remember that his wife Rae worked as a waitress at the Honegger Cafe on Locust Street in Fairbury. Fairbury's new City Hall now stands where the Honegger Cafe used to be located.

In 1942, the United States was at war with Germany, Italy, and Japan. Various war factories were set up in Illinois to make weapons and supplies for World War II. These war factory jobs were union jobs that paid very well. The competition was tough to get hired into one of these war factory jobs.

George W. Ziller made national news in 1942. The Illinois Attorney General and the Mclean County State's Attorney started an investigation that alleged George Ziller sold jobs in the Illinois war factories. It was reported that in the early months of 1941, crowds gathered each Sunday about the home of Ziller in Weston. People formed lines to see him about the privilege of working on the government projects. Witnesses reported they paid Ziller \$300 in advance for a war factory job, plus \$63 for union fees. After they got the job, they had to pay Ziller \$50 per week from their paycheck. Job applicants also had to pay Ziller \$25 to join his Democratic Club. It was estimated that Ziller took in over \$400,000 in income from this scheme. Newspapers reported he had homes in Weston, Fairbury, Springfield, and Chicago.



Ziller got one man a war factory job. After the man started the job, he decided to quit paying Ziller the \$50 a week fee. Ziller told the man that if he wanted a fight, he would send some boys out of Chicago to take care of him. Ziller said to him that hiring the Chicago boys would only cost him \$50.

This scandal attracted national newspaper coverage. All aspects of George Ziller's life were investigated and then reported in many newspapers. It was reported that George always carried a large wad of cash. He kept a \$1,000 bill wrapped around the outside of the bundle of money. One of his cars was a big black Cadillac that had a red spotlight. The red spotlight designated that the vehicle belonged to a police officer. George carried a police officer's star, but nobody knew who issued it to him. People said that George drove seventy miles an hour through Bloomington on his way to Springfield and did not pay attention to any stoplights. The Bloomington police officers just waved at him as he drove by.

The FBI eventually joined the investigation. During the investigation, Ziller disappeared for a while. It must have been embarrassing for the officials to admit they could not find a six-foot six-inch man that weighed 525 pounds!

Eventually, Ziller was found and indicted on five counts of conspiracy and operating a confidence game. Because of all the publicity in McLean County, a change of venue to Piatt County was granted. The Piatt County judge dismissed all the charges because of a procedural error in McLean County with the grand jury. Officials decided to try to indict George again in 1945. This time, George decided to plead guilty because he claimed he had poor health. He was fined \$1,350 and released.

George was briefly jailed again in 1947 for attempting to bribe members of the Illinois House of Representatives. He filed for bankruptcy again in May of 1947.

Many of George's neighbors when he lived in Weston reported that he was a good fellow who often gave treats to the local children. He once threw a big picnic in Weston where alcohol was served. When some of the guests had too much to drink, George stopped the serving of additional alcohol. George W. Ziller became ill in 1957 and was admitted to the Fairbury

Hospital. He died in the Fairbury Hospital, and the funeral was held in Chenoa. He was buried in Payne Cemetery in Eppards Point Township.



Photo of George Ziller who was 6' -6" Tall and Weighed 525 Lbs.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Fairbury, Illinois in 1888**

#### **Local Historian Publishes Book on Life in Fairbury in 1888**

In 1888, the Chapman Brothers in Chicago published a book titled ***Portrait and Biographical Album of Livingston County Illinois***. This is a massive book with about 1200 pages.

This 1888 book contains the biographies of 116 citizens of the Fairbury area. Dale C. Maley, local Fairbury historian, extracted the biographies of these Fairbury citizens and made it into a new book titled ***Fairbury, Illinois in 1888***.

In addition to the Fairbury biographies, Maley also extracted the portraits and farm illustrations associated with these pioneering citizens. The farm illustrations are very interesting to review compared to modern farms. This new book makes a relatively concise 154-page short story focusing only on Fairbury area citizens.

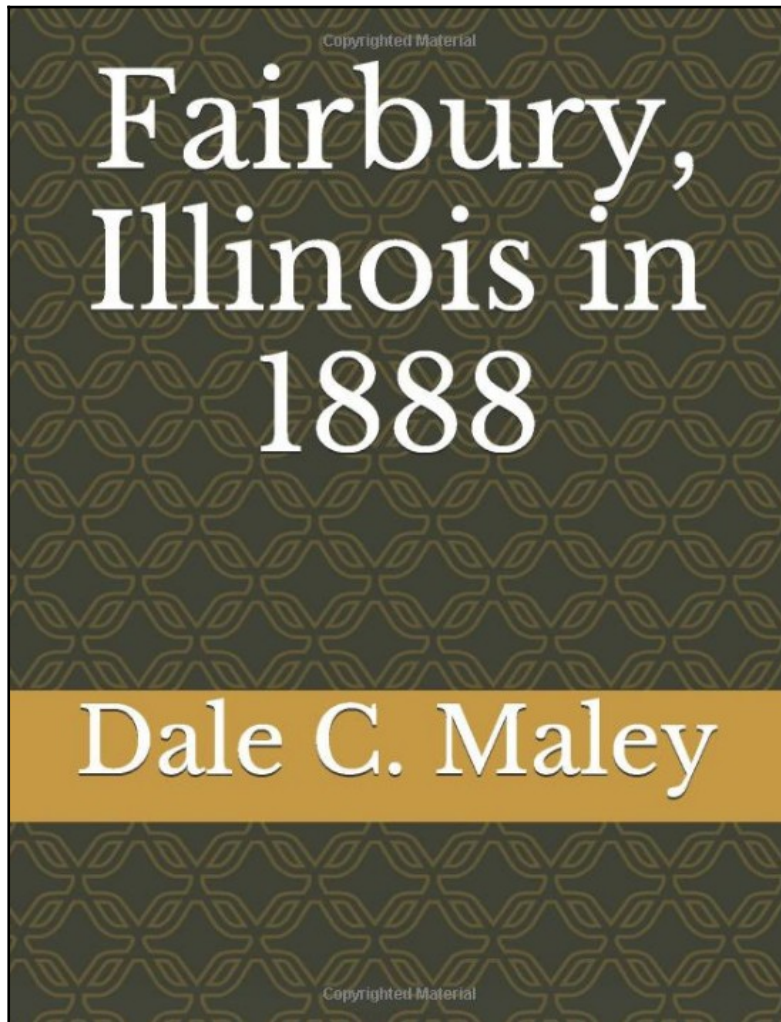
This new book includes stories about twenty-two Fairbury citizens who served in the Civil War. These stories include what unit the men fought with and what battles they served in. One Fairbury man paid a substitute \$1,000 to take his place in the Union Army. Paying a substitute was a legal practice in the Civil War. Another Fairbury man met a Southern belle in Richmond, Virginia. He married her and brought her back to Fairbury.

Dr. C.B. Ostrander did not serve in the Civil War, but he tried to help free the slaves. Dr. Ostrander helped rescue and free a black slave from Virginia. He helped transport the slave to his eventual freedom in Maiden, Canada.

Another biography includes the 400 Pottawatomie and Kickapoo Indians who were still living in the Fairbury area when the first settlers arrived.

The biography of Fairbury's wealthiest citizen, Thomas A. Beach, is also included. By the time he died, it is estimated Beach was worth \$50 million in 2014 dollars.

Maley's new book is available as a Kindle e-book from Amazon. He has also printed and donated a copy of this new book to the Dominy Memorial Library in Fairbury.



## CHAPTER 4

### **1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition**

#### **Local Historian Publishes Book on Fairbury and the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition**

Back before the age of television, millions of Americans attended the World Fairs held in various American cities. The 1893 World's Fair was held in Chicago, and many Fairbury citizens attended the fair.

In 2004, Erik Larson published a book titled *The Devil in the White City: A Saga of Magic and Murder at the Fair that Changed America*. He combined two different stories into this one book. The first story is the history of designing and building the 1893 World's Fair. The second story is about Dr. H. H. Holmes. Dr. Holmes was one of America's worst serial killers. He designed a hotel where visitors to the World's Fair could stay, but might not check out because Dr. Holmes murdered them. He possibly murdered over 200 people in the couple of years he lived in Chicago. His hotel included rooms where he gassed visitors, with an acid vat or gas chamber in the basement to dispose of his victim's bodies.

It turns out that Fairbury had a strong connection to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. John Virgin was a nationally known importer of large draft horses from France. He was a strong supporter of the Fairbury Fair and the Illinois State Fair. The Governor of Illinois appointed John Virgin of Fairbury to the committee that planned the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

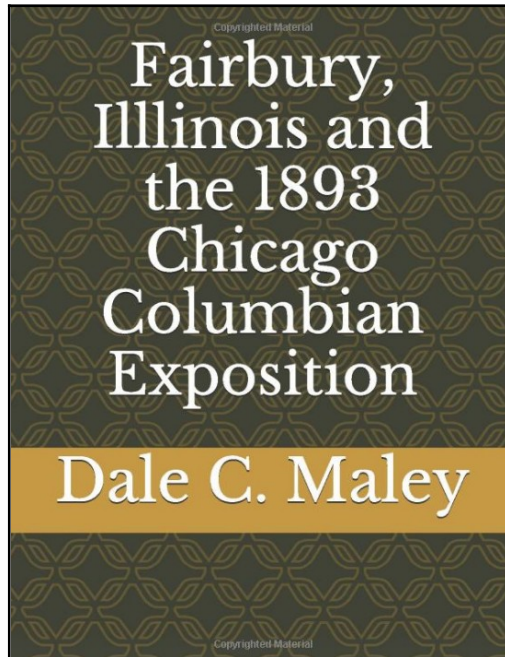
William Stackpole, another early Fairbury citizen, suggested that domes be used on the new World's Fair buildings. Mr. Stackpole made and lost three fortunes during his lifetime.

Thomas A. Beach of Fairbury also visited the World's Fair. Mr. Beach was probably the wealthiest man to ever live in Fairbury. His net worth at his death likely exceeded \$50 million in 2014 dollars.

Many Fairbury citizens worked at the Keeley Institute in Dwight, when it was in operation. Thousands of Americans came to Dwight to be cured of alcoholism. The treatment involved injecting traces of gold into the patient's bloodstream. A pretty young nurse at the Keeley Institute was lured to Chicago by Dr. Holmes. He courted her, but eventually grew tired of her and asphyxiated her in an air-tight room in his hotel.

Dale C. Maley, local Fairbury historian, recently completed a new book titled ***Fairbury, Illinois and the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition.*** Maley used Erik Larson's technique and combined two stories into one book. Maley's book combines the story of serial killer Dr. H. H. Holmes and the Fairbury citizens involved in the World's Fair.

Maley's new book is available as a Kindle e-book from Amazon. He has also printed and donated a copy of this new book to the Dominy Memorial Library in Fairbury.





## CHAPTER 5

### **Fairbury Murder Book**

#### **Local Historian Publishes Book on Fairbury Murders**

Fairbury was founded in 1857. Since it was founded, a total of eight murders have been committed in Fairbury.

Dale C. Maley, local Fairbury historian, recently researched all eight murders. His research results were published in a new book titled ***History of Murders Committed in Fairbury, Illinois.***

Fairbury's first murder occurred in 1896 in a farm house south of town. Charles Burrell, a 26 year-old farm hand, was smitten with the farmer's 17 year-old daughter, Ida Mae Steers. When she refused his affections, he shot her and then killed himself.

Fairbury has the unusual distinction of having two City Marshall's murdered. In 1899, Sam Rightsell refused to pay his \$30 bill to Doctor Thatcher. The court issued a judgment against Sam and ordered him to pay the bill. Constable Joseph Galloway removed a horse and a cow from Rightsell's house when he was not home. The livestock was taken to the livery stable to be sold to pay the Doctor's bill. Rightsell became enraged. He tried to shoot Constable Galloway, but ended up being shot himself. He limped to the Bartlett house at the corner of 5th and Walnut streets. He hid in the cellar. The police were called. City Marshall Fred Baird responded to the call. Unaware of the previous altercation between Constable Galloway and Sam Rightsell, Baird started to go down the cellar stairs. Rightsell shot City Marshall Fred Baird to death. The whole city of Fairbury mourned the loss of Fred Baird because he was both a City Marshall and the Chief of the Fire Department.

In 1908, Fairbury voted to go "dry" and eliminate the evils of alcohol. In May of 1910, the city voted to resume alcohol sales. On the first day the saloons re-opened, Ray Scriven spent all day drinking in the saloons. That evening, on Main Street, Scriven threatened to kill young Cora Smith.

Cora was walking to the train station to mail a letter. City Marshall Amos Brown was notified and he confronted Scriven. A tussle occurred between the two men on the west end of Main Street. Scriven pulled a revolver and shot City Marshall Amos Brown dead. Scriven ran from the murder scene, and was never apprehended for the crime. A wanted poster was issued for Ray Scriven using his Fairbury Township varsity football team picture. This is the only Fairbury murder where the killer was never caught and brought to trial. There is one report that Ray Scriven died about 1949 when he was 65 years old.

In 1917, Ernest Reutter owned a barber shop and employed two barbers. Business was good, so he hired a third barber, Eli Limeberry. Unfortunately, it turned out that Eli was an alcoholic. After having problems with Limeberry in his barber shop, Ernest Reutter fired Limeberry. Every day around noon, Reutter walked from his barber shop to his house for lunch. A couple days later, Limeberry waited until Reutter started his daily walk home for lunch. An argument occurred, and Limeberry shot Reutter to death. The murder occurred at the intersection by the Methodist Church and Ace Hardware.

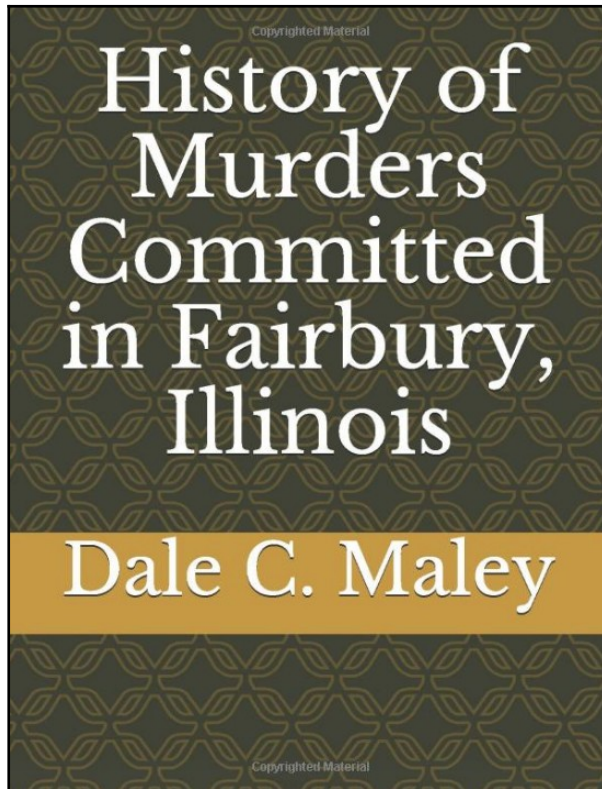
In 1928, James Churchill was driving a horse-drawn wagon full of rock on First Street about three miles north of Fairbury. The rock came from his father's quarry north of Fairbury by the river on First Street. Churchill encountered a blue Chevrolet driven by Harice Leroy Carter. Carter was a young black man who worked in a restaurant in Forrest. He had three female passengers in his Chevrolet. They were returning to Fairbury after fishing on the Vermilion River.

An argument occurred about who had the right-of-way on the one-lane road. A heated verbal exchange took place, and finally Carter went around the wagon and on to Fairbury. In Fairbury, one of the women passengers in the car gave Carter a gun and encouraged him to go drive back and shoot Churchill. Carter then drove back on First Street, found Churchill, and shot him dead. Both Carter and the woman who encouraged the crime were convicted and sent to prison.

Maley's new book is available as a Kindle e-book from Amazon. He has also printed and donated a copy of this new book to the Dominy Memorial



Library in Fairbury. He will be giving a Fairbury history lecture at the Library on Saturday Jan. 16 from 1 to 3pm.





## CHAPTER 6

### **Fairbury Book Authors**

#### **Local Historian Publishes Book on Fairbury Authors**

Dale C. Maley, local Fairbury historian, recently conducted research to identify all Fairbury book authors. His research results were published in a new book titled ***Fairbury, Illinois Book Authors.***

He was surprised to find there have been at least thirty-seven Fairbury book authors. These thirty-seven authors have published 162 books.

The most nationally famous Fairbury person to publish a book was Francis Townsend. He published an autobiography which includes his experiences growing up in Fairbury. Townsend initiated a national movement to implement state-funded old-age pensions. His movement is credited for pushing President Roosevelt to institute the Social Security pension system we have today.

The Fairbury authors have written books which cover almost all the major book genres. These include poetry, biographies, romance, religious, political, and various non-fiction topics.

The most prolific author is Dale Maley with sixty-one books covering financial topics and Fairbury history. The second most prolific author was Professor Lee Garber. He wrote thirty-four books about law and education. Alma Lewis James comes in third with twelve books. She is most famous for her Fairbury history book titled **Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars**. Judith Wells is fourth on the list with seven math books.

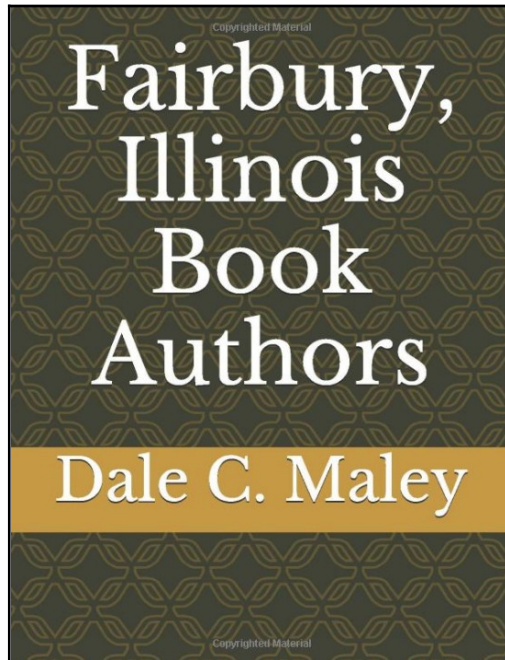
William Stackpole wrote three books about rivers and canals. He has one U.S. Patent on a river dredging device. He is a very interesting character who made and lost three different fortunes. He ended up dying penniless. He did not have enough money to pay for grave stones for himself, his wife, and daughter. They are buried in unmarked graves in Fairbury's Graceland cemetery.

Benjamin Nussbaum wrote two extensive history books. These two books cover the North and South Side Apostolic church histories.

Dr. Ervin was a medical doctor in Fairbury in the 1960's. His book includes many stories about the time he spent living and practicing in Fairbury.

Ralph Romig was a sign-painter by profession. He was also a poet. He had one book published which contains many of his poems. Ralph was interviewed about his poetry book shortly before he passed away. He said he enjoyed life and was going to have the epitaph "It's been fun" put on his tomb stone. You can see his epitaph on his tomb stone in the small Cooper cemetery southwest of Fairbury.

Many of the books written by Fairbury authors are available at the Dominy Memorial Library or the Echoes Museum. Maley's new book is available as a Kindle e-book from Amazon. He has also printed and donated a copy of this new book to the Dominy Memorial Library in Fairbury.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Sanborn Insurance Maps**

#### **Sanborn Insurance Maps Shed Light on Early Fairbury History**

The Sanborn Map Company was a publisher of detailed maps of U.S. cities and towns in the 19th and 20th centuries. The maps were originally created to allow fire insurance companies to assess their total liability in urbanized areas of the United States. Since they contain detailed information about properties and individual buildings in approximately 12,000 U.S. cities and towns, Sanborn maps are invaluable for documenting changes in the built environment of American cities over many decades.

Sanborn held a monopoly over fire insurance maps for the majority of the 20th century, but the business declined as U.S. insurance companies stopped using maps for underwriting in the 1960s. The last Sanborn fire maps were published on microfilm in 1977, but old Sanborn maps remain useful for historical research into urban geography.

The Sanborn Map Company made fire insurance maps of Fairbury in the years 1885, 1892, 1898, 1906, and 1911. Until just a few years ago, copies of these old maps of Fairbury were only available in-person at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. A few years ago, the state of Illinois had an initiative to digitize more records. As part of this effort, these old maps got scanned in and digitized.

Today, these maps are available to everyone through the internet. The Illinois State Library has copies of these incredibly detailed maps on their web site. They are a treasure-trove of historical information. The earliest map in 1885 has three sheets. As Fairbury continued to grow in population, the city expanded. By the time of the last map in 1911, it required nine sheets to show the entire town.

Back in the 1880s, there were small businesses in the basements of the stores on Locust Street. Often you went down a stairs from the Locust

Street sidewalk to go to the business. The Sanborn maps show the locations of these basement businesses.

These maps even extend further than the city limits. For example, the 1885 Sanborn map shows the clay tile factory of Rufus Straight. This factory was located in the general area where the Dos Fuentes Mexican restaurant is located today.

The maps also show the location of some of Fairbury's coal mines. The coal mine located one mile west of Fairbury is shown. The longest operating coal mine in Fairbury is also shown. This coal mine closed in 1941 and was located at the entrance to the Timber Ridge subdivision on Seventh Street.

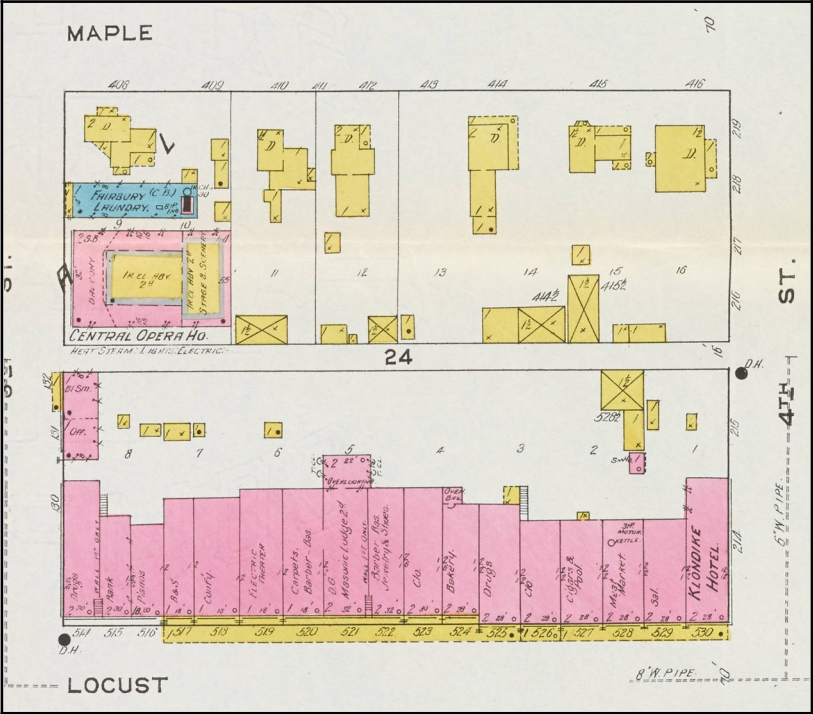
Other interesting businesses shown on these Sanborn maps include the huge Kring greenhouse complex that was just west of the high school. The Fairbury Foundry is also shown just west of Dave's Supermarket. Joseph Slagel's machine shop is also shown at Sixth and Locust Streets. He manufactured hit and miss engines at his Fairbury Motor Works. Isaac Walton and Edison schools are also shown on these old maps.

Alma Lewis James wrote the Fairbury history book titled *Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars*. She intentionally only covered the period from the 1857 town founding until 1900. She thought the whole lifestyle changed too much after 1900. The 1885 Sanborn map would have been an excellent addition to her book. She probably did not know the Sanborn maps existed when she wrote her book.

Because the Sanborn maps are so detailed, it is hard to see them on a small computer screen. These old maps are much easier to read if they are printed onto a large sheet. Mylar is a plastic-like material that is very durable. Mylar copies of the three pages from the 1885 Sanborn maps are available at the Dominy Memorial Library and Fairbury Echoes Museum.

The three sheets from the 1885 Sanborn map were electronically combined into one large document. This large sheet was printed to create a mural showing how Fairbury looked in 1885. This mural hangs in a display window at Steidinger Tire on Locust Street.

The Sanborn maps are probably one of the greatest Fairbury historical finds in the last ten years. Local history buffs utilize the maps to learn further information about early Fairbury. Family genealogists use the maps to verify the location of the family homes of prior generations. They are a great resource to anyone doing historical research about Fairbury.



1911 Sanborn Map showing Central Opera House





## **CHAPTER 8**

### **WJEZ Radio History Segments**

#### **Local Historian Records WJEZ Radio Segments on Fairbury History**

In early 2016, the WJEZ radio station in Pontiac wanted to run ten-minute segments on different aspects of Livingston County History.

The series began with a couple of Pontiac history segments done by Dave Sullivan. Cynthia Grau, of WJEZ radio, also wanted to include communities outside of Pontiac. She contacted Dale C. Maley and requested he put together some Fairbury history segments.

Maley put together three Fairbury history segments initially. He then recorded them with Cynthia Grau at WJEZ's recording studio on North Mill Street at Pontiac. Cynthia then edited each segment, and played one segment each Friday morning. Every three weeks after the initial recording session, Maley and Grau recorded another batch of three Fairbury history segments.

Maley has now recorded a total of fifteen different Fairbury history segments. He estimates that he will conclude with a total of about twenty history segments. These segments include the founding of Fairbury, railroads, coal mines, murders, authors, famous people, Dominy Library, Echoes Museum, Fairbury area ghost towns, and Indians.

Maley was recently asked what type of preparation work he does for each history segment. Maley replied, "Using historical information I have already collected, I make an outline for each ten-minute segment. I sometimes have other Fairbury people review my outline for corrections or additions to the story. I then use this outline as my script when I record the ten-minute segment."

The ten-minute segments are recorded as Podcasts. This means the segment can be listened to anytime from an Internet web site. You can listen to these Podcasts at WJEZ's web site. It is easier to find and choose

which segments you want to listen to on the [FairburyILAttractions.com](http://FairburyILAttractions.com) web site under the History Tab.

These radio broadcasts led to the discovery of previously unknown key historical information. A former Fairbury resident who worked at the old Court House in Pontiac heard the coal mine broadcast. She realized she knew where some Fairbury coal mine tunnel maps were located in their record collection. She contacted the radio station and Maley was able to secure a copy of the tunnel maps. The tunnel maps are for the coal mine under Indian Creek Golf Course.

These history segments make Fairbury history easy to access for people interested in learning more about Fairbury. The short ten-minute segments give a quick overview of most of Fairbury's history. They should make a great permanent record for future generations to study and better understand Fairbury history.



## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Fairbury Coal Mining Book**

#### **Local Historian Publishes Book on Fairbury and the Coal Mines**

Dale C. Maley, local Fairbury historian, recently completed a new book titled ***Coal Mining in Fairbury, Illinois***. His new book took about four years to research. The book is 155 pages with 140 different illustrations.

Fairbury coal mining all began with the Marsh family. Father John and son Henry Marsh moved to Fairbury from Washington, Illinois, around 1859. John Marsh bought farm land adjacent to Fairbury and converted some of it to the Marsh Addition. They donated the land which is now Marsh Park in 1859.

Father and son then decided to try digging for coal west of Fairbury. At that time, the conventional wisdom was that coal in Illinois would only be found along the major rivers. They were successful around 1862, and discovered coal about 200 feet below the surface.

The Marsh's discovery of coal ignited a revolution with respect to coal mining in Illinois. New coal mines began to spring up all over Illinois. The coal mines created a population boom in Fairbury. The population went from 269 in 1860 to 2,505 in 1910. People from Europe moved to Fairbury to get a job in one of the coal mines.

Some very interesting items were found as a result of doing the research for this book. A 1914 mining ledger from one of the Fairbury coal mines was loaned to the author. The handwritten entries give the coal miner's names, how much coal they mined each day, and how much they were paid. The ledger also lists all the retail customer's names and how much they paid for their coal.

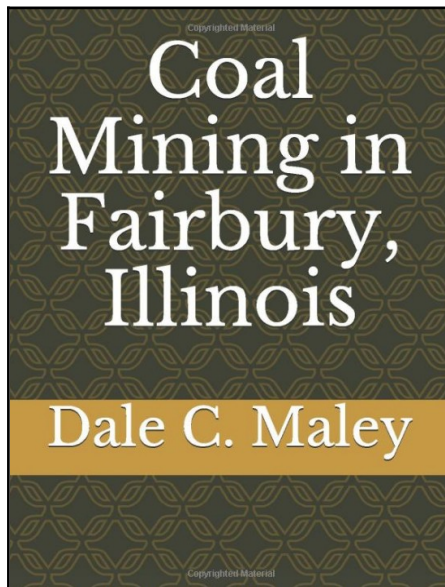
Three group photos of Fairbury coal miner's were found at the Echoes Museum. The museum also has an actual mining lamp used by a Fairbury coal miner.

Coal mining has always been a relatively hazardous occupation. A safety rule-of-thumb was found that after 1917, one death per 380,000 tons of coal mined was the normal fatality rate. About 1.7 million tons of coal were mined from Fairbury. Applying the safety rule-of-thumb, it was expected there would be four to five fatalities occur in Fairbury coal mines. Maley was able to find records for four fatalities in the Fairbury coal mines.

A hand-written copy of Henry Marsh's 1886 last will & testament was also found. Maley was able to decipher the old handwriting and type up a modern version of his will.

Maley was able to confirm that mules were used in the Fairbury coal mines to pull small train cars. Mules were used until they were replaced by electric motor driven cars.

Maley's new book is available as a Kindle e-book from Amazon. He has also printed and donated copies of this new book to the Dominy Memorial Library and Echoes Museum in Fairbury.



## **CHAPTER 10**

### **William T. Stackpole Book**

#### **Local Historian Publishes Book on William T. Stackpole**

Dale C. Maley, local Fairbury historian, recently completed a new book titled *William T. Stackpole of Fairbury, Illinois*. This new book is a biography about one of the most interesting characters of early Fairbury.

During his life, William was a gold prospector, pioneer, farmer, merchant, grain speculator, oil field worker, real estate sales person, inventor, writer, publisher, and visionary.

The Stackpole family moved from Maine to Pekin, Illinois, when William was five years old. William then caught the "gold bug" when gold was discovered in 1848 in California. He went to California and struck it rich as a gold prospector.

He moved back to Pekin from California a rich man. He bought farm land and was the first pioneer farmer of Anchor, Illinois. Unfortunately, the Panic of 1857 wiped him out financially.

He married in Pekin and then moved to Fairbury. He couldn't find any work during the Civil War, so he worked in the oil fields of Pennsylvania. He left his bride in Fairbury. Stackpole was so bored that he wrote a 239 page novel. He came back to Fairbury and was a real estate sales person the rest of his life.

Stackpole had a life-long dream of improving the water navigation between the Great Lakes and New Orleans. He wanted a much bigger canal than the old Illinois & Michigan canal. He also wanted the Mississippi river better maintained.

Stackpole patented a dredging device. It could be attached to the back of a boat to dredge rivers. He claimed that another man stole his idea and made millions from it. Stackpole also tried speculating in wheat markets. He got

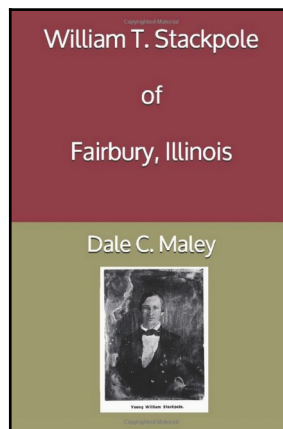
so sick he could not enter any trades, and he was wiped out financially again.

Back in the late 1800s, World Fairs were a very popular event attended by millions. Each successive city tried to have a better main attraction than the previous event. Planning was begun for the 1893 Columbian Exposition or World's Fair in Chicago. Fair officials were having difficulty coming with a main attraction better than the Eiffel Tower in the last fair. Stackpole presented fair officials with a huge dome concept. His idea was not adopted by fair officials. The main attraction of the 1893 Columbian Exposition turned out to be the first huge Ferris Wheel.

Late in life, Stackpole published a series of four magazines in Chicago. He wrote articles lobbying for better water navigation. Other writers contributed stories about popular topics of the day. Maley found copies of these 1889 magazines at the ISU library and Newberry Library in Chicago.

It is said that William made and lost at least three different fortunes. He died penniless. William, his wife Jennie, and his daughter Anna, are buried in unmarked graves in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery. The house that William built in Fairbury still exists today.

Maley's new book is available as a Kindle e-book from Amazon. He has also printed and donated copies of this new book to the Dominy Memorial Library and Echoes Museum in Fairbury.



## **CHAPTER 11**

### **Archer House Sign**

#### **Another Historic Fairbury Sign Going Up**

By the time this article hits the press, this may be old news! Dale Maley is very busy again this year doing great things for Fairbury.

Dale has researched more signage on downtown buildings. In the past couple weeks, Dale has been working on recreating and painting another sign – This time on the old Archer House. This building is between Once `n Again and the Video Store.

Here is some interesting information about this project:

Dale did extensive history on this building. He found the Archer House was built by George Archer back in 1882. Sometime around 1892, the building name was changed to the Sherman Hotel. We do have a photograph of the building sign repainted to the Sherman Hotel. Unfortunately, no photographs of the Archer House building sign are known to exist.

It is interesting that the "House" word from the original 1882 sign, lasted longer than the newer "Hotel" word painted over it in 1892. Using the ghost sign word "House", Dale was able to determine the original font was Clarendon. This font was invented in 1845, so it was age appropriate for this building sign.

In 1886, an average of 14 people per day stayed at the Archer House. The cost was \$2.00 per day, or about \$55 per day in 2017 dollars.

Dale used his computer to print out paper copies of the 29 inch tall letters. He glued the paper onto thin plywood. He then cut wood stencils for each letter to mark the brick wall. Once the letter was marked, he taped each letter. Three coats of high quality latex house paint were applied to each letter.

Dale had difficulty placing the man-lift in the correct location. Jim, from ACE hardware, helped him set-up the man-lift, and then return the rental unit to Ace when the job was completed. Dale had to take one day off from painting when the winds were too high to safely work 35 feet in the air. Thanks go to Prairie Lands Foundation for covering the cost of the man-lift rental and painting supplies.

"Wow! No task seems to big or daunting for Dale Maley! Fairbury is indebted to this gentleman who volunteers tons of time for our community. Thank you, Dale, for all your great work." comments Bobbi McKeon, owner of Heart's Desire and coordinator of the Specialty Shops group.

"Along with the other projects Dale has undertaken, this project really does add to the historic appeal and appearance of our community." concludes Bobbi.



**Before**





Dale C. Maley with one of the plywood patterns used to re-paint the Archer House sign



**After**

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **Lough & Ellis Drum**

#### **Over 100-Year-old Bass Drum Returned Home to Fairbury**

Recently, an antique collector in Towanda, Illinois, decided it was time for the old bass drum in his collection to return back home to Fairbury. He contacted the Fairbury Echoes Museum, and Vice-president Dale Maley drove to Towanda and picked up the vintage drum.

After the drum was safely transported from Towanda to the Fairbury Echoes Museum, Dale Maley began a search to discover who the Lough & Ellis Associated Players were. He found the story started with a musically inclined barber named Samuel Evan Ellis (1863-1935). Mr. Ellis was a barber in Fairbury from about 1883 until his death in 1935.

Mr. Ellis married a Fairbury music teacher, Agnes Richer (1862-1923), in 1885. In 1890, their only child, a son, Charles Ellis (1890-1950) was born in Fairbury. From an early age, Charles Ellis was a gifted actor, musician, and magician. He was in the entertainment business his entire adult life.

The other major figure in the Lough & Ellis Associated Players was Fred Lough. Fred's father was a Civil War veteran and suffered a disabling injury. In 1886, when Fred was just six years old, his father checked himself into a Kansas home for disabled veterans. Fred's father was never again part of his family life. Fred's father died in 1914. Mr. Ellis, the barber, became a father figure for Fred Lough.

By the year 1900, Fred Lough was 20 years old and a day laborer. His mother Hester was the head of their Fairbury household, and she was a restaurant keeper. Fred was also musically inclined. He also learned how to be an auto mechanic and electrician.

The first printed reference to Lough & Ellis occurred in the April 26, 1907, Blade. This article reported Charles Ellis, the magician, and Fred Lough had entered into a contract with the managers of Webster Park, near Peru. They contracted to exhibit on the park grounds during the summer months.

Mr. Ellis had a large tent and gave daily exhibitions during the season. Mrs. Ellis, the music teacher, accompanied them as pianist and Bessie Dye was the singing member of the company. Charles Ellis was 17 years old, and Fred Lough was 27 years old.

In 1908, the barber S.E. Ellis and Fred Lough opened a picture show in Fairbury. This was likely the first moving picture show to open in Fairbury. Also in 1908, Lough & Ellis started putting on performances in the Central Opera House.

In 1909, S.E. Ellis and Fred Lough continued to operate their Lough and Ellis Electric Theatre. Mr. Ellis, the barber, sold his barber shop so he could go out on the road with the Lough and Ellis shows.

In 1912, Lough & Ellis Associated Players were performing in a big tent west of the water tower. Charles K. Ellis took the leading role in the plays. This is the first printed mention of the name Lough & Ellis Associated Players. That year, the Lough & Ellis show also performed in Chatsworth. The Chatsworth Plaindealer newspaper complimented the group on giving an excellent performance.

In 1913, the Lough & Ellis tent show performed in Gibson City. Lough & Ellis ran an ad in the New York Clipper magazine looking for actors and musicians to come work in Fairbury.

In 1914, the Lough & Ellis Associated Players, with Charles K. Ellis playing the leading role, opened their season in Fairbury on May 11.

By 1917, Charles Ellis was traveling around the United States, including Oklahoma. He had a son, Donald Sullivan Ellis, born in Oklahoma City. He married Eda Ray Thompson (1896-1968) in 1920, in Oklahoma.

In 1917, Fairbury formed a municipal band. Fred Lough was a member. Charles Ellis was not listed as a member, because he had probably left Fairbury and was on the road. In June, Mr. and Mrs. Sam Ellis and Fred Lough went to Emporia, Kansas, to join Charles Ellis, who was playing there.

In April of 1919, the barber Sam Ellis and Fred Lough tried their hand at running an automotive garage. This did not work out, and by October, Sam Ellis went back to work as a barber. Fred Lough went to work as a mechanic at the Wade Motor company in Fairbury.

In 1922, Fred Lough continued to be active as a musician in Fairbury. He participated in the Methodist Sunday School orchestra.

In 1923, the wife of Sam Ellis, Agnes Clemence Richer(1862–1923), died in Fairbury. She was age 61. Fred Lough then left Fairbury and moved to Aurora to work as an electrician. Fred Lough joined the Aurora Commandery Band. He married Lydia Witherell. They had no children. In 1956, Fred Lough died at aged 76 in Aurora and was buried there. In 1959, Lydia, wife of Fred Lough, died at age 72.

By 1930, S.E. Ellis, age 66, re-married and was living with his wife, Effie. They lived at 209 North First Street in Fairbury. He was a barber in his own barbershop. In 1935, S.E. Ellis, the musical barber, died at age 72 in Fairbury.

In 1930, Charles Ellis, age 38, was living with his wife and their son Donald at 2746 Hamden Court, Chicago. He listed his occupation as a stagehand in the theatre industry. In 1933, Charles Ellis applied for a Seaman's Protection Certificate at the Port of New York. He was likely working as an entertainer on a ship.

In 1940, Charles Ellis was aged 60 and was divorced. He lived by himself in the N. Dearborn Raleigh Hotel in Chicago, Illinois. His census occupation was a stagehand. In 1950, Charles Ellis, age 59, died in Kansas City, Missouri. He was buried in Goshen, Indiana. His death notice identified him as Chief Electrician of the road show "Oklahoma."

In 1944, Donald S. Ellis married Mary Francis Mason (1911-1998). They never had any children. He died in 1951, in Chicago.

In the case of both of these families, their families died out in terms of successive generations. There were no heirs to inherit the Lough & Ellis Associated Players bass drum. It is unknown how the old bass drum ended up in Towanda.

The exact age of the old bass drum is unknown. It most likely was made between 1908 and 1912. The vintage drum will be safely stored at the Fairbury Echoes Museum. It will be used for periodic displays involving Fairbury musical themes.





## **CHAPTER 13**

### **McDowell Book**

#### **Local Historian Publishes New Book on McDowell Family**

Back in August of 2018, Dale Maley hosted a group of visitors from Fairbury, Nebraska. At that time, he was aware that Judge Woodford G. McDowell had traveled from Fairbury, Illinois to Nebraska to establish a new town. He named this town Fairbury, Nebraska, after his hometown back in Illinois.

Other than this fact, Maley did not know any more about the McDowell family. This prompted him to research the family thoroughly. He used this research to write his new Fairbury history book titled ***The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois.***

James McDowell had nine children. Three of these children's families came to Avoca Township, north of Fairbury. The first McDowell arrived in 1832, just three years after Major Darnall arrived in 1929. The McDowell's were among the early settlers to the Fairbury area.

Descendants of those three McDowell children who came to this area helped to establish six different cities. These cities include Avoca, McDowell, Fairbury, Gibson City, Pontiac, and Fairbury, Nebraska.

Since the McDowells first settled in Avoca Township, they helped to establish three cities near their farms. These included Avoca, McDowell, and Fairbury. Avoca is now a ghost town, with only the cemetery remaining.

Moses K. McDowell and his brother Frank moved from Fairbury to Gibson City in 1873. They were in the meat market business. They became upstanding citizens and helped Gibson City grow into a prosperous town.

Mary E. McDowell married Samuel C. Ladd. He was one of the pioneering citizens of Pontiac. Both Ladd Street and Ladd School in Pontiac are named after him.

The most famous and most accomplished McDowell was Judge Woodford G. McDowell (1818-1904). He was a self-taught lawyer, like Abraham Lincoln. Another Livingston County Judge admitted him to the bar. Woodford ran for office and became a Livingston County Judge. He was also an astute businessman and real estate developer.

Judge Woodford G. McDowell arrived very early to the Fairbury area. He saw what happened when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad came through in 1857. The new town of Fairbury caused the value of farmland to skyrocket when it was converted to city residential building lots. The village of Avoca immediately shut down, and many of the houses were moved to Fairbury. Judge McDowell also saw how Pontiac prospered when the railroad came through, and it was designated a county seat.

Judge McDowell decided that he could make a lot of money if he could find another location where a new railroad was going to be laid. He could buy the farmland at low prices and then sell it at high prices in his new town. The real estate would become even more valuable if his new town could be designated as a county seat, like Pontiac.

So Judge McDowell went to Nebraska with his brother and tried to find a spot for a new town where the railroad would come through. He also wanted to make sure that no other cities were around, so his new town would be designated the county seat. He purchased farmland where he thought his future new town would be located.

Judge McDowell guessed correctly where the new railroad would be laid. He also guessed correctly that his new town would become the county seat. As a result, he made a fortune from the formation of his new city, Fairbury, Nebraska.

Some of the McDowell descendants have been very generous to Fairbury. Floyd Stafford married Marion McDowell. They donated many things in Fairbury including the Floyd and Marion Stafford Pool, North Park, and the Echoes Museum.



Some of the McDowells were Fairbury bankers. The G.Y. McDowell bank safe still exists and is being used by Alexander Lumber in their Fairbury location. Several homes built by the McDowells in Fairbury are still standing.

Several descendants of the McDowell family provided Maley with some extremely rare photographs to use in the new book. These rare photos include one of the Avoca churches and a wooden bridge. Family photographs were also provided to be used in the book.

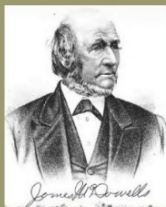
This research project turned out to be a fascinating story. It covers the McDowells as pioneering farmers to the Fairbury area. It also includes their role in founding the towns of Avoca, McDowell, Fairbury, Pontiac, Gibson City, and Fairbury, Nebraska. The McDowell family generosity has given Fairbury the Floyd and Marion Stafford Pool, North Park, and the Echoes Museum.

Maley donated printed copies of his new book to the Dominy Memorial Library, the Echoes Museum, and the Pontiac Library. Printed copies of the book can be purchased at the Walton Centre in Fairbury. Electronic Kindle copies or conventional paper books can also be purchased from Amazon.

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# The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois

Dale Maley



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## CHAPTER 14

### **Kring Family Book**

#### **Local Historian Publishes New Book on the Kring Family**

Local historian, Dale C. Maley, was aware of some of the history of the Kring family in Fairbury. He was aware they operated a vast greenhouse complex, just west of the Prairie Central High School. He was also aware the Kring family operated a foundry. This foundry made cast iron decorative doorway columns for several Fairbury businesses.

Maley has also been searching for photos of Fairbury citizens in their Civil War uniforms. He recently discovered an 1863 photograph of John Kring in his Civil War uniform. This last discovery prompted him to research the family thoroughly. He used the results of this research to write his new Fairbury history book titled *The Kring Family of Fairbury, Illinois*.

In 1856, one year before the city of Fairbury was founded, John Kring Senior and his wife Rachel Smith moved their family from Ohio to the Fairbury area. Four of their seven children and their families also relocated to the Fairbury area.

In 1850, Congress passed a new law granting land to Military veterans, including veterans of the War of 1812. Most veterans did not want to move to Illinois, so they sold their land patents to farmers who did want to move to Illinois.

John Kring Sr. obtained 320 acres of land just north of Fairbury. He got this land by purchasing government land warrants issued to two military veterans. He also bought 40 acres from the government for \$2.50 an acre.

John Kring Sr. and his wife Rachel became founding members of the Methodist church in Fairbury. A few years after he moved to Fairbury, John Kring Sr. and his son went to Chicago using his \$600 carriage. This carriage would be worth about \$16,000 in today's dollars. While they were in Chicago, someone offered him 120 acres in trade for his carriage. John Kring Sr. looked at the land, but it was under-water. He decided he

preferred the Central Illinois prairie better. This under-water land later became part of downtown Chicago worth millions of dollars!

In his new book, Maley then explores the lives of the four children that moved from Ohio to the Fairbury area.

Son George Washington Kring became a blacksmith and a builder of farm equipment. He received two U.S. patents for farm equipment. One patent was for a field cultivator. The second patent was for a cornrow check planter.

To use a check row corn planter, the farmer would lay down a rope or steel cable with knots about every 30 inches. The farmer would then run the horse-drawn planter down the field, with the knotted rope running through the planter. Each knot in the rope would trip a mechanism on the planter, which then planted a corn seed. At the end of the row, the farmer had to pull the stakes and move the rope over one increment.

Some Fairbury farmers noted that George Washington Kring forgot to patent the most critical part of his invention, the knotted rope!

Maley was able to use the old Sanborn Insurance maps to identify the location of the Kring blacksmith shop. It was located just west of Dave's Supermarket.

Son Henry Kring farmed a few years in the Fairbury area, before moving his family to Nebraska.

Son John Kring Jr. enlisted with the 3rd Cavalry Company K in the Civil War. He came back to Fairbury after the Civil War ended. Two of his sons ran the Kring greenhouse complex for 40 years until it closed in 1942.

The Kring greenhouse complex was huge. It had an 82-foot tall brick chimney. The tall chimney was hit by lightning three times during the 40-year life of the greenhouse. Each lightning bolt would blow out huge chunks of brick from the chimney.

The huge greenhouse boiler also heated three nearby homes using steam. Two of the houses belonged to the two Kring brothers that ran the greenhouses. The third home was the Thomas A. Beach home on Hickory

Street. This home is often called the Lion house, because of the two concrete lions in the front yard. When the greenhouse closed in 1942, those three homes had to find their own heating furnaces.

One of the two sons that ran the greenhouse recounted a story that his grandfather, John Kring, Sr. told him. When his father John Kring Jr. went off to fight in the Civil War, his grandfather had to take over farming their land. During the Civil War, what is now Locust Street (commonly called Main Street), was just a wheat field!

The third son of John Kring Jr. started out working on the TP&W railroad. He worked his way up to telegraph operator in Fairbury. He was then promoted and moved to the main office in Peoria. He eventually rose to the Manager responsible for setting shipping rates. He worked for the TP&W 50 years.

The last of John Kring Sr.'s sons was Lafayette Miller Kring. He ran the Kring Foundry from about 1876 until 1903. The Fairbury foundry continued to operate until 1909, when it was converted to the Klondyke Carriage company building.

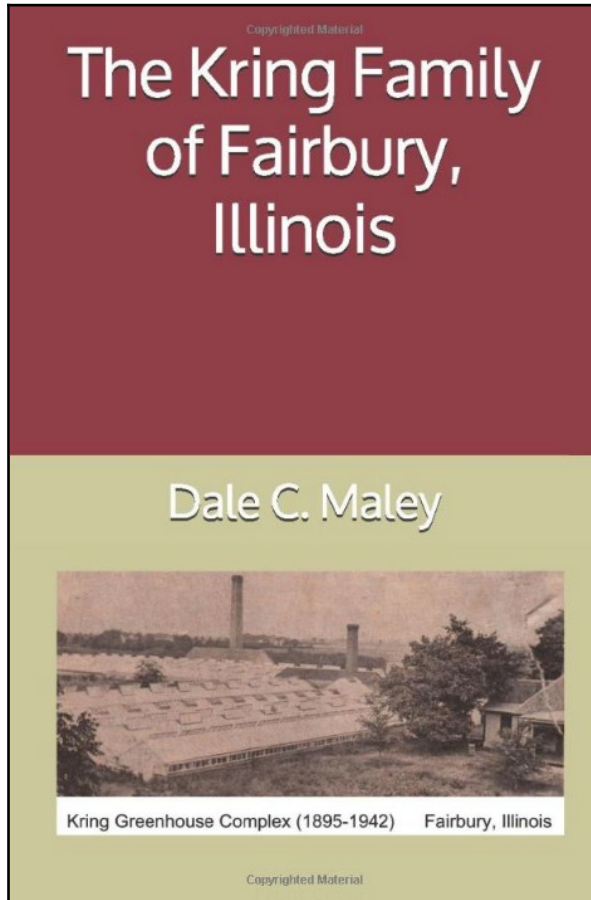
If you walk down Main Street in Fairbury, many buildings have decorative vertical trim pieces on the sides of the doorways. Most people assume these are wood pieces. If you rap on these pieces with your knuckles, you will find they are cast iron and not wood.

Maley walked the entire length of Locust or Main Street in Fairbury and found four buildings still have vertical columns made by the Fairbury Kring Foundry. The word Kring is cast into the bottom of these vertical columns.

Maley hopes this book will help people to better understand the critical role the Kring family played in Fairbury history. They were some of the early pioneers that helped Fairbury grow from only 269 people in the 1860 census to about 3,800 people today.

Maley donated printed copies of the new book to the Fairbury Dominy library, the Fairbury Echoes Museum, and the Pontiac library. Paper copies of his books can be purchased at the Walton Centre in Fairbury.

You can also purchase Kindle e-books or conventional printed books from Amazon.com.



## **CHAPTER 15**

### **Founding of Fairbury Book**

The earliest book which describes the founding of Fairbury is William Le Baron's 1878 book titled ***The History of Livingston County, Illinois***. This book notes the first two settlers in Livingston County were Frederick Rook and V.M. Darnall. Mr. Darnall settled south of Fairbury. Mr. Rook located west of Pontiac at Rook's Creek.

This 1878 history book also describes the founding of Fairbury. It notes the key players were farmer Caleb Patton and railroad engineer Octave Chanute. Caleb Patton offered the Octave Chanute half of the new city lots if Chanute would run the new train tracks through his farm. Chanute accepted the offer, and Patton laid out the village of Fairbury.

Fairbury historian Dale C. Maley recently became aware of two new historical reference sources. The first source is a database maintained by the Bureau of Land Management. This database contains a record of the purchases of farmland from the Government. This database is searchable by the purchaser's name and by the township. This database can be used to see who the early pioneer farmers were in the Fairbury area.

The second new historical reference source is a complete land abstract which documents the founding of Fairbury. Fairbury resident Debbie Kaye Craddock preserved this 1957 abstract and made a copy available to Maley. In 1957, Bert Moulton, the barber, bought his shop on the east end of Locust street. The land abstract for this real-estate transaction covers the history of this land back to when it was purchased from the Government. This document includes the farmer Caleb Patton and the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad engineer Octave Chanute. It adds a new colorful character to the story of the founding of Fairbury, Dr. J. Leland Miller.

Diane Pawlowski had also done some excellent research on early Fairbury. Using the 1860 U.S. Census, she identified the occupation of all 262 residents of Fairbury. This information gives a great snapshot of Fairbury just three years after it was founded.

The farmland around Fairbury was mostly swampland. In the 1880s, clay field tile started to be used to drain the swampy land. This tiling revolution turned worthless swampland into some of the most productive farmland on the planet.

Large tile factories in Fairbury were run by Mr. Strait and Mr. McDowell. Bill Fugate recently donated some old clay tile to the Fairbury Echoes Museum. It is believed these tiles were made on the Fugate farm.

Maley decided to use all of this information to write a new book about the founding of Fairbury. He wanted to expand the story to include the pioneer farmers in Avoca, Indian Grove, and Belle Prairie townships. He also wanted to explain the tiling revolution that occurred on Fairbury farms. Another goal of the new book was to expand the story of how the village of Fairbury was founded. He wanted to include the role of Dr. J. Leland Miller in the founding of Fairbury. He also wanted to review the occupations of the citizens of Fairbury in 1860.

The mindset in the 1800s was that if the land was not close to a river and did not have trees, it was considered worthless. This explains why Southern Illinois was the first part of the state to be settled. It also explains why Central Illinois was the last area to be settled.

By 1840, a few pioneer farmers settled in Avoca, Indian Grove, and Belle Prairie townships. Every single one of these pioneer farmers bought land located on either the Vermilion River or on Indian Creek.

After 1840, very few additional farmers located in the Fairbury area. In 1850, Congress passed a new law, granting farmland to military veterans. Most of these were veterans of the War of 1812. Very few of these veterans wanted to move to swampy Central Illinois. They chose to sell their land rights at a discount to the official Federal Government price of \$2.50 per acre.

This new 1850 law triggered a wave of new pioneer farmers into the Fairbury area. Most of these pioneer farmers came in the 1852-1855 period. The 1850 law was phased out by 1860. Land sales in the Fairbury area also died off by 1860.



A new Illinois state law in 1851 authorized the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad to run new tracks from Peoria east to the Indiana state line. Both farmers and land speculators got very excited after this new law was passed. A substantial financial return could be made if the railroad was run through a farm which was then converted to city residential building lots.

The new 1851 law triggered a lot of speculation in Fairbury area farmland. One of those land deals even made the Chicago newspapers. In 1855, Dr. J. Leland Miller bought 212 acres at \$12.50 per acre. Just 10 months later, Dr. Miller sold this same land for \$25/acre. He doubled his money in less than 10 months!

As the new railroad neared Fairbury, the competition heated up between three farmers. Caleb Patton won the competition by offering Octave Chanute half the new town building lots if he would run the track through his farm. Caleb Patton had bought his land from Dr. J. Leland Miller.

The other two farmers who lost the competition were not happy. They threatened to get court injunctions to prevent the railroad from being laid on Patton's farm.

Octave Chanute came up with a brilliant plan. He decided to run the new railroad up to the edge of Patton's farm and then stop laying new rails. He had his crew resume the track laying on the other side of Patton's farm.

Chanute knew the Livingston County courthouse in Pontiac was closed on Saturdays and Sundays. No court injunction could be obtained on the weekend. He was also aware of a law about new railroad tracks. The law said that once a locomotive was run over new tracks, the tracks could not be removed.

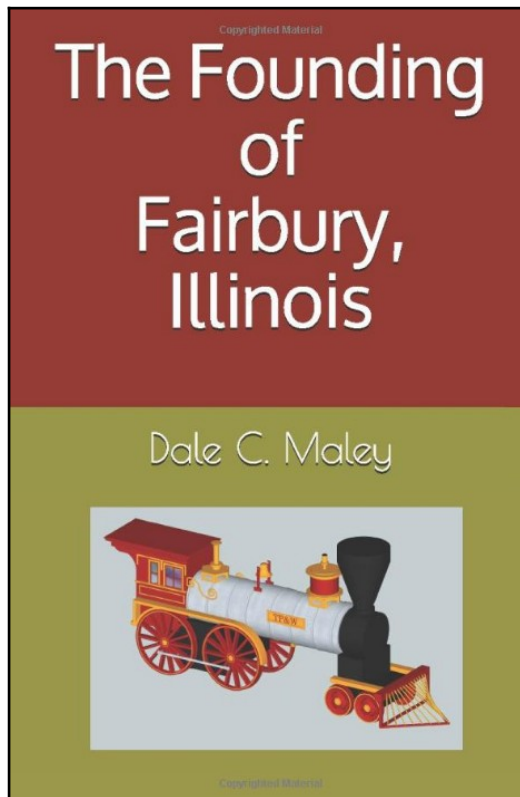
Chanute sent his crew to Patton's farm on a Friday night. During the weekend, his men laid the track on Patton's farm. When the rails were installed, he had a locomotive run over the new tracks. By Monday morning, the railroad was completed through Patton's' farm.

One of the two farmers that lost the competition was Mr. Atkins. Although he lost the competition to have the railroad run through his farm, he gained a new son-in-law. Dr. J. Leland Miller married his daughter Julia. They

lived in Fairbury a few years, then moved back East where he was from. Dr. Miller became a very wealthy man.

Maley hopes this new book helps people better understand how both our farms and the village of Fairbury was founded.

Maley donated printed copies of the new book to the Fairbury Dominy library, the Fairbury Echoes Museum, and the Pontiac library. Printed copies of the book can be purchased from the Walton Centre in Fairbury. Kindle e-books or conventional printed books can also be bought from Amazon.com.



## **CHAPTER 16**

### **The Goudy Brothers**

#### **Local Historian Researching Famous Fairbury Motorcycle Racers**

Local historian, Dale C. Maley, is currently researching the lives of Frank and William Goudy. These two brothers raced motorcycles between 1911 and 1916. They held many national speed records and were both inducted into **The Motorcycle Hall of Fame**. Maley will use the results of his research to write a new book titled *The Goudy Brothers of Fairbury, Illinois*.

The Goudy brothers grew up in Fairbury. Older brother Carl Goudy got interested in the new invention of motorcycles. The big three motorcycle manufacturers at that time were Excelsior, Harley-Davidson, and Indian. Around 1911, Carl obtained an Excelsior motorcycle dealership for Fairbury. Carl tried to sell Excelsior's to the Fairbury rural mail carriers. They would not purchase any Excelsior's, because they did not think they were fast enough. To prove to the mail carriers how fast the Excelsior's were, Carl raced an Excelsior at the Fairbury Fair.

Carl went on to race at regional motorcycle races, then moved into national motorcycle racing. His younger brother, William Goudy, joined him as a motorcycle racer. Both Carl and William became employed by Excelsior as their professional racers. Carl Goudy married his Fairbury grade-school girlfriend in 1916 in Chicago.

When Maley performs historical research, he often uses the resources of the local Fairbury Echoes Museum. He found the museum has several significant items related to the Goudy family. The museum has the actual wedding dress worn by Hazel Dominy Bane when she married Carl Goudy in Chicago in 1916. He will be using a photograph of this 103-year-old wedding dress in his new book.

The wedding in Chicago had a relatively small wedding party. The only people at the wedding were the bride and groom's parents, a Fairbury preacher, and some Fairbury friends of the bride. Mr. Schwinn, who

owned both the Excelsior Motorcycle Company and the Schwinn Bicycle Company, also attended the wedding.

Because of the small number of people who attended the Chicago wedding, very few wedding invitations were printed. When Maley checked the Fairbury Echoes Museum, he was surprised to find one of these 1916 wedding invitations. Ruth Taylor, a long-term Fairbury resident, kept two scrapbooks from that era. She later donated the scrapbooks to the Echoes Museum. In one of her scrapbooks, Ruth included one Goudy-Bane wedding invitation.

Also in Ruth Taylor's scrapbook was a wedding photograph of the bride and groom. This photograph was printed in a Chicago newspaper that no longer exists. No microfilm or computer images exist for this old newspaper. Maley will be using a copy of this wedding photograph in his new book.

Using Ancestry.com, Maley was able to determine that a daughter of Carl Goudy was still living. He was also able to learn that a grandson of Carl Goudy was living in Boise, Idaho. Maley first did a phone interview with the grandson of Carl Goudy. The grandson was thrilled someone was writing a book about his grandfather. The grandson then provided digital copies of excellent photographs of both Carl and William Goudy on their motorcycles. The grandson actually visited Fairbury about four years ago. They were very impressed with the Dominy Memorial Library, and Fairbury in general. Maley provided a rough draft of his new book for the grandson to review.

The grandson then arranged for his 94-year-old mother to do a phone interview with Maley. She told him that she lived in Fairbury when she was in the fourth and fifth grades. She lived with her Grandmother Bane. She attended school with Bob Wharton. She was able to answer several of the questions that Maley had regarding her father.

About a week later, the great-granddaughter of Carl Goudy also contacted Maley by email. She reported that her father had printed out the rough draft of Maley's book. Both her father and grandmother were surprised to learn new facts about Carl Goudy from his manuscript. She said her 94-

year-old grandmother really enjoyed the phone interview she had with Maley the previous week.

Maley has concluded his research into the lives of the Goudy brothers. He is now in the editing and proofreading stage of the project. He expects the new book to be completed and available for sale in early March.

### **Local Historian Publishes New Book on the Goudy Brothers of Fairbury**

The most nationally famous Fairbury citizen was Francis Townsend. He organized a national movement for the federal government to provide pensions to older citizens. Townsend's campaign helped to prompt President Roosevelt to adopt the Social Security system that we still have today.

Two existing books document Francis Townsend and his political movement. One book is the autobiography that Townsend wrote. The second book is about political campaigns and includes the Townsend movement.

Probably the second most nationally famous Fairbury citizens were the Goudy brothers from Fairbury. They both held world-records in motorcycle racing between 1911 and 1916. Both of them were inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1998.

Fairbury historian and author, Dale C. Maley, investigated and found there were no books documenting the careers of Carl and William Goudy. This drove Maley to research the lives of these two Fairbury boys. He then used the results of this research to write a new book about the Goudy brothers.

The father of the Goudy brothers was J. Frank Goudy. He was a jeweler in Fairbury for forty years. The oldest son, Carl Goudy, was born in 1890. The younger son, William Goudy, was born in 1893.

Both boys attended Fairbury grade schools and high school. Younger brother William was quite a football player at the Fairbury Township High School. After high school, Carl decided to follow in his father's footsteps as a jeweler and clock-maker. Carl attended the Bradley Polytechnic

Institute in Peoria. This school was one of few colleges in the United States teaching horology, or clock-making. This college is now Bradley University.

About this time, a new invention arrived in Fairbury, the motorcycle. Carl got very interested in this new invention. The first big three motorcycle manufacturers were Excelsior, Harley-Davidson, and Indian. Around 1911, Carl obtained an Excelsior dealership for Fairbury.

Carl tried to sell the Fairbury rural mailmen new Excelsior motorcycles. The mailmen would not buy them because they thought Excelsior's were not fast enough. To prove to the mailmen that Excelsior's were the fastest motorcycle, Carl raced one at the Fairbury Fair.

After doing well at the Fairbury motorcycle races, Carl started racing in regional contests. He then moved on to the national racing circuit. He became employed by Excelsior as one of their professional factory racers.

In the winter-time, when there were no motorcycle races, Carl played on the Fairbury adult basketball team. This team was called the Bon Ton Limits. Their basketball games were very popular events in Fairbury.

Younger brother William Goudy followed his brother into motorcycle racing also. He was also very successful at motorcycle racing. He joined his older brother Carl as a professional racer for the Excelsior company.

The Goudy brothers reached the peak of their national popularity in 1915. In September, Carl won the biggest race of the year at the Chicago Maywood race track. It was a 300-mile grueling race. Brother William Goudy also competed in that race but finished seventh because he had engine troubles.

In January of 1916, Carl loaned his younger brother William the high-speed Excelsior motorcycle that won the Chicago 300-mile race. William did practice laps with Carl's Excelsior on the Bakersfield, California race track. Another professional racer did practice laps on his motorcycle with William.

A third professional racer entered the track and passed William and the other racer. Then the third racer spilled his motorcycle on the track. To avoid hitting the downed motorcycle and driver, William and the other driver became entangled on the track. Both gentlemen were thrown across the track. One of them hit a fence post, the other hit a tree. William and the other driver were killed.

Older brother Carl was in Los Angeles when he got word of younger brother William's accident. He rode his motorcycle as fast as possible to Bakersfield, but William had died before he reached him. Carl buried his brother in California.

After his brother's death, Carl decided to marry his Fairbury grade-school sweetheart, Hazel Dominy Bane. She agreed to marry him, but only if Carl would first give up motorcycle racing. Carl decided to give up motorcycle racing before the wedding in July 1916. Mr. Schwinn, the owner of the Excelsior motorcycle company and the Schwinn bicycle company, attended the Chicago wedding.

After he was married, Carl served in the Navy Air Corps in 1918-1919. He then enrolled in the Pratt Institute, N. Y. He was graduated in 1921. After graduation, he then worked a few years as an instructor at the Pratt Institute.

Carl's first job after graduating from Pratt Institute was with Pacent Electric Company. The owner of that company was Louis G. Pacent. Mr. Pacent was a pioneer in the field of radio and electronics.

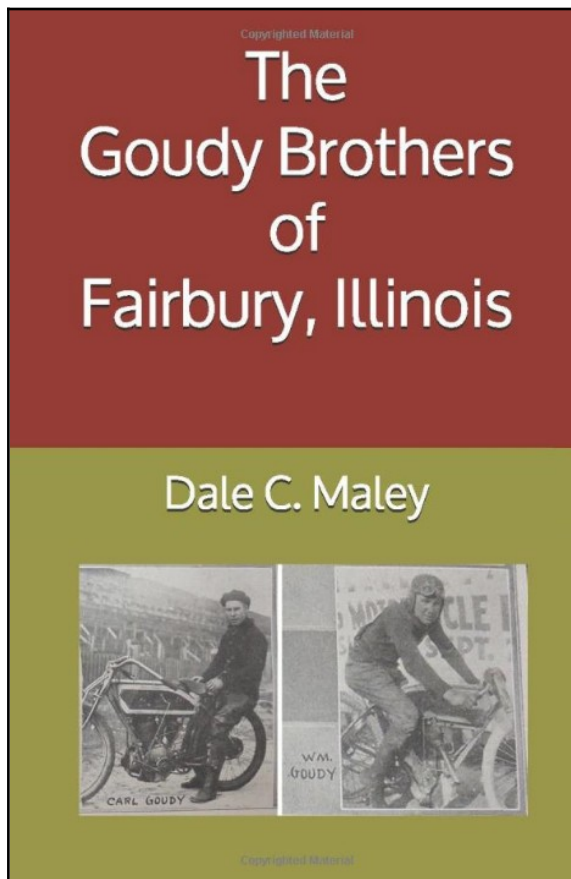
In 1934, along with several of his friends, Carl started his own company in his basement. His company made various types of electronic equipment including antenna for military and residential applications. During his working career, he was awarded 15 U.S. Patents. Carl eventually became Chairman of this company.

Carl Goudy died in April of 1964 in New York. His wife, Hazel, passed away on September 5, 1981, in California. They are both buried in the mausoleum at the Fairbury Graceland Cemetery.

In 1998, both Carl and William Goudy were inducted into the AMA Motorcycling Hall of Fame.

Maley hopes that his new book will help people to better understand the lives of two of Fairbury's most nationally famous citizens.

Copies of the new book have been donated to the Fairbury Dominy library, the Fairbury Echoes Museum, and the Pontiac library. Printed copies of the book can be purchased from the Walton Centre in Fairbury. Kindle e-books or conventional printed books can also be bought from Amazon.com.





## **CHAPTER 17**

### **History of Fairbury Waste Treatment**

#### **Fairbury's Waste Treatment System Adapting to the 21st Century**

Fairbury's first public vote on building a waste treatment plant occurred in 1939. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, unemployment reached 25%. To attempt to create government jobs, President Roosevelt established many new government agencies. One of these agencies was the WPA or Works Progress Administration. The WPA employed millions of unskilled men to carry out public works projects.

The City of Fairbury attempted to get WPA funding to build its first waste treatment plant. They were turned down by the WPA. The City went ahead and had a public vote to issue new bonds to pay for the new waste treatment plant. The referendum failed with 177 no and 112 yes votes.

In December of 1957, the City took another vote to issue new bonds to pay for the first waste treatment plant. This time, the referendum passed. In May of 1958, the City Council voted to add a sewer charge to the water bills to pay off the bonds. The plant was built and put into operation in 1959. Before the plant was built, raw sewage from the south side of Fairbury was discharged directly into Indian Creek. The new plant eliminated raw sewage from being released into Indian Creek.

In 1973, new federal EPA laws required a significant upgrade to Fairbury's waste treatment facility. The City retained the services of the Farnsworth Group, a consulting engineering firm, to develop the design of the new plant. Farnsworth was unable to design Fairbury's new plant because the Illinois EPA had not decided how to interpret the new federal law.

Additional confusion was caused by a flow meter at the plant not being calibrated correctly. When the Illinois EPA visited the facility, they recorded the flow rate using the faulty meter. Farnsworth then checked and discovered the flow meter was mis-calibrated, and the actual flow was much less than the EPA thought. In 1974, a meeting between Farnsworth

and the Illinois EPA finally resolved all the issues. Farnsworth then designed a new facility for Fairbury.

In July of 1975, a vote was taken to modernize the Fairbury waste treatment facility. Advocates of the new facility pointed out that EPA restrictions were severely limiting the growth of Fairbury. Because of the EPA restrictions, no new territory could be annexed to the city. No new apartment buildings housing more than 15 people could be built either. Plans for a new 100-bed nursing home to be constructed by the swimming pool were also canceled because of the EPA restrictions.

The vote passed for the modernization of the facility. In 1979, the City Council voted to increase sewage bill rates to pay for the upgrade. In 1980, an Open House was held at the newly upgraded waste treatment plant.

The initial focus of the federal EPA was on reducing pollution from sanitary sewers and industrial facilities. It was assumed that rainwater run-off was a relatively minor contributor to pollution.

After the initial efforts of the EPA were successful in reducing sanitary sewer pollution and industrial pollution, another review of rainwater run-off was conducted. It was found that rainwater run-off does include some pollutants. The focus of the EPA shifted to minimizing pollution from rainwater run-off.

Most cities, including Fairbury, have combined sewer systems. Both sanitary sewage and rainwater run-off end up in the same pipes. Ideally, each municipality would separate the waste streams. One stream would be sanitary sewage and the other would be rainwater run-off.

To separate these waste streams in Fairbury would require digging up and replacing all the drain piping. The cost is estimated to be more than \$200 million. A much lower cost option would be to modify the system so that all wastewater is treated at the plant. For Fairbury, this cost is about \$31 million. The 30-year loan for this project has a 1.5% interest rate. There are approximately 1800 users of the system.

Monthly sewage bills are expected to rise by 10% in 2019 and another 10% in 2020. In subsequent years, the billing rate is expected to increase by about 2.5% annually.

Construction of the new plant started in August of 2018. The new plant will be completed by September of 2021. The maximum capacity of the old plant was 2.4 million gallons per day. The new plant will have a capacity of 20 million gallons per day.

The old plant was very energy inefficient. According to Brad Duncan, City Wastewater Superintendent, one of the focuses of the new plant is improved energy efficiency. The goal is for the new plant to have lower operating costs than the old plant. To lower acquisition costs, the current building and some equipment will continue to be used in the new plant. The new system will utilize new back-up power generators to assure the system stays in service at all times.

A significant change with the new system will be how the Timber Ridge subdivision is serviced. The current system utilizes a pumping station. There have been several sewer back-ups in Timber Ridge because of electrical outages or frigid weather. In the new design, the pumping station will be replaced by a gravity feed system.

The new system will also utilize better waste treatment methods. After the new waste treatment plant is completed, the water leaving the plant will be even cleaner than it is today. The new plant will be more energy efficient and will reduce the amount of pollution released to the environment.



New Concrete Sewer Pipe Fittings for Upgrade Project

## **CHAPTER 18**

### **The Las Vegas Connection**

#### **Fairbury's Connection to Las Vegas**

One of Fairbury's early business entrepreneurs was Jacob Von Tobel. He was born in Zurich, Switzerland and attended Swiss schools. He learned the cabinet maker's trade in Switzerland. In 1868, at the age of 29, he sailed to America and ended up in Fairbury, Illinois. He started a window sash factory in Fairbury. He then quickly expanded into remodeling and building homes. He gradually built up a full-service lumberyard in Fairbury.

Mr. Von Tobel married Miss Catherine Keller, March 19, 1871. Miss Keller was born in Zurich, Switzerland, November 2, 1843. In 1900, he sold his lumber yard and retired from active life. Jacob Von Tobel died on March 2, 1933.

The citizens of Fairbury wanted to convert his old lumber yard into a park. The site of Von Tobel's lumberyard was sunken about three feet below the rest of the area. The TP&W railroad brought in flatbed cars of dirt from a project they were doing by Forrest. Volunteers unloaded the soil from the flatbed cars and filled in the old lumberyard site. Today, this is Fairbury's Central Park.

Another early citizen of Fairbury was Heinrich "Henry" Beckley. He was born in Switzerland in 1841. He married Magdalena Ruttiman in Switzerland. They had seven children while living in Switzerland. On May 22, 1884, their family moved to Fairbury. Henry Beckley died in 1891, and Magdalena died in 1915.

Jacob Von Tobel had a son named Edward Von Tobel, who was born in 1873. Henry Beckley had a son named Jacob "Jake" Beckley, who was born in 1875. These two Fairbury boys became life-long friends.

Jacob Von Tobel dropped out of Fairbury Township High School, but continued his education informally, working in his father's lumberyard, traveling in Europe, and reading newspapers voraciously. When he was 20

years old in November 1903, he was sitting in a St. Louis cafe with his boyhood buddy, Jake Beckley, drinking beer and reading a paper.

"It reported that the temperature in Los Angeles was 72 degrees, and it was zero in St. Louis," Von Tobel related, in a 1964 interview. "There also was an advertisement for the Santa Fe Railroad, offering a settler's rate, one-way to California for \$30."

Von Tobel hated cold weather, and the two chums borrowed money for tickets. Ed found work in a Los Angeles lumberyard and Jake as a barber. But less than two years later, another newspaper ad caught their eyes, this one suggesting readers could "get in on the ground floor" when lots were auctioned in a brand new town, on the new railroad linking Los Angeles and Salt Lake City. Round-trip tickets cost only \$22, and those who bought them could brag they rode the first passenger train on the line. However, with less than \$100 between them, after buying their tickets, Von Tobel and Beckley didn't expect to "get in on the ground floor" — or even a walk-up.

The young men stepped down from the car at a town consisting of one passenger railroad car, parked on a siding, equipped with a sign saying "Las Vegas." In the distance stood a tent camp, established earlier by a competing promoter, but the site of the future city was barren desert. Beneath a big mesquite tree, on what is now North Main Street, was a crude lumber platform, where an auctioneer and railroad officials could sit in the shade as the auction progressed. Bidders stood in the full sun as the temperature climbed to 110 — a scorcher, even for May in Las Vegas. Men shucked coats and vests, but they continued to sweat as the auctioneer's gavel rapped out the future of Las Vegas.

The only reason nobody left, Von Tobel would recall later, was the fear of missing the bargain of a lifetime. With more than 2,000 people present, choice business lots sold for \$750, but who knew how long it would be till the well-heeled bidders were satisfied, and lots might go for a few dollars?

And that's what happened. On the second day of searing heat, the bidders' enthusiasm wilted. To encourage more bidding, the railroad announced that the round-trip fare some had paid could be deducted from a down

payment, which was a fourth of the cost of a lot. Beckley and Von Tobel bought adjoining \$100 lots for a cash outlay of \$3 each, and a ticket stub.

The feeling of good fortune must have sustained Von Tobel until he returned to his Los Angeles job, to find he no longer had one. His employer had seen him at the land auction and had hired a replacement. With no other job prospects, Von Tobel decided to move to Las Vegas and open a new lumber yard. He borrowed money from his father back in Fairbury to buy lumber, nails, hardware, a delivery wagon, and a team to pull it. Boyhood friend Jake Beckley became his partner.

Unfortunately, seven other lumberyards opened up in Las Vegas. After an initial building boom, there was not enough business to maintain that many lumber yards. Von Tobel bought out Jake Beckley's interest in the company. Jake and his brother Will Beckley then operated a men's clothing store in Las Vegas.

Von Tobel served on the first City Council of Las Vegas. He ran for the County Commission but lost to Ed Clark, another businessman. Von Tobel's sons eventually took over and continued to run the lumberyard business in Las Vegas. The family developed three innovations in the lumberyard business. They were the first to allow customers to get their own materials, versus waiting for an employee to get them. They also started the practice of selling lumber in large climate-controlled buildings versus an outdoor warehouse. They were also one of the first companies to allow customers to use carts to haul their own lumber from the store shelves.

Ed Von Tobel Middle School in Las Vegas is named after Edward Von Tobel from Fairbury, Illinois.







## **CHAPTER 19**

### **Joseph Slagel**

#### **Joseph Slagel – Early Fairbury Inventor**

Joseph was born Feb 12, 1883, on a farm south of Fairbury. He was the son of Rev. Samuel Slagel and Mary Demler Slagel. His father was of German descent and was born in Iowa. His mother was from Switzerland.

He had a little brother Samuel who died when he only 4 years old. Another brother Daniel died in 1967. Sister Emma died in 1961.

In the 1900 U.S. Census, Joseph was age 18 and was living at home with his parents, his sister Emma, and brother Daniel. The father's occupation was blacksmith and farmer. Joseph's occupation was a farm laborer. Other sources noted that Joseph had an outstanding mechanical aptitude as a child.

When he finished country school, his father let him build his own shop on the father's farm. In September 1903, he moved to town and set up his own machine shop. His machine shop was at the northwest corner of Sixth and Locust street. The machinery in his shop included lathes, drilling machines, planers, and milling machines. At the time, it was one of the best-equipped shops in Central Illinois.

On Aug. 10, 1905, at the age of only 22, Joseph filed for a U.S. Patent on a lubricator for steam engines. Steam engines had lots of moving parts that needed constant lubrication. His invention used a pump to force the lubricant to where it was needed. On Sept 25, 1906, U.S. Patent number 831,899 was granted to him.

On May 24, 1906, at the age of 23, Joseph married Emma Wagler from Davis, Iowa. She was 21 years old.

In the 1910 U.S. Census, we find Joseph and his wife Emma married and living on Locust Street (Main Street) in Fairbury. His occupation is the proprietor of a machine shop.

The Sanborn Insurance Company made maps of Fairbury between 1885 and 1911. The 1911 Sanborn map shows Joseph's machine at the northwest corner of Sixth and Locust Streets. The Sanborn map shows he had a 50-gallon gasoline tank, electric lights, and steam heat from the boiler. The gasoline tank was to fuel the gasoline-powered engines he was manufacturing.

Joseph manufactured hit-and-miss engines in his machine shop. They are a type of four-stroke internal combustion engine that is controlled by a governor to operate at a set speed. It was conceived in the late 19th century and produced by various companies from the 1890s through approximately the 1940s. The name comes from the speed control on these engines: they fire ("hit") only when operating at or below a set speed, and cycle without firing ("miss") when they exceed their set speed. This is as compared to the "throttle governed" method of speed control. The sound made when the engine is running without a load is a distinctive "POP whoosh whoosh whoosh whoosh POP" as the engine fires and then coasts until the speed decreases, and it fires again to maintain its average speed.

Many engine manufacturers made hit-and-miss engines during their peak use—from approximately 1910 through the early 1930s when more modern designs began to replace them.

Joseph needed a source of castings to make his gasoline engines. The 1885 Sanborn maps show the existence of the Kring Foundry just west of Dave's Supermarket. Lafayette Kring ran the Kring Foundry in Fairbury. At least four buildings on Locust Street have vertical door trim pieces made in the Kring Foundry.

In 1911, early Fairbury plumber, C.B. Day, was featured in a story in the weekly issue of the Metal Worker, Plumber, and Steam Fitter magazine. He was featured in this trade magazine because of his unique marketing method. At the Fairbury Fair, he set up displays. For the city ladies, he showed the latest in indoor plumbing items. For farmers, he demonstrated easier ways to get water for the farm. He featured water pumps powered by Midget engines from the Fairbury Motor Works, which was Joseph Slagel's company.

In 1913, at age 30, Joseph was a brilliant young man. He received a patent when he was only 22 years old. He had his own machine shop, Fairbury Motor Works, making hit-and-miss Midget engines. He was also listed in the *Automobile Trade Directory* for his Fairbury Motor Car Works. He may have had aspirations to make complete automobiles.

Unfortunately, in 1913 Joseph started to experience serious health issues. He placed an ad in the *Thresherman's Review* magazine to sell his Fairbury machine shop. In 1914, the Blade reported that Joseph Slagel was confined to his house with a nervous breakdown. It was hoped that the much-needed rest would restore him to his usual activities. On September of 1914, at age 31, Joseph and wife moved to a ranch in Miesse, New Mexico.

Many early cars used acetylene gas at high pressure to power the headlights. This was called the Prestolite tank and/or generator. Joseph owned such a vehicle in New Mexico. In 1915, Joseph was killed when this pressurized gas system blew up his car. Because these acetylene systems were so dangerous, they were replaced in a few years by electric lights.

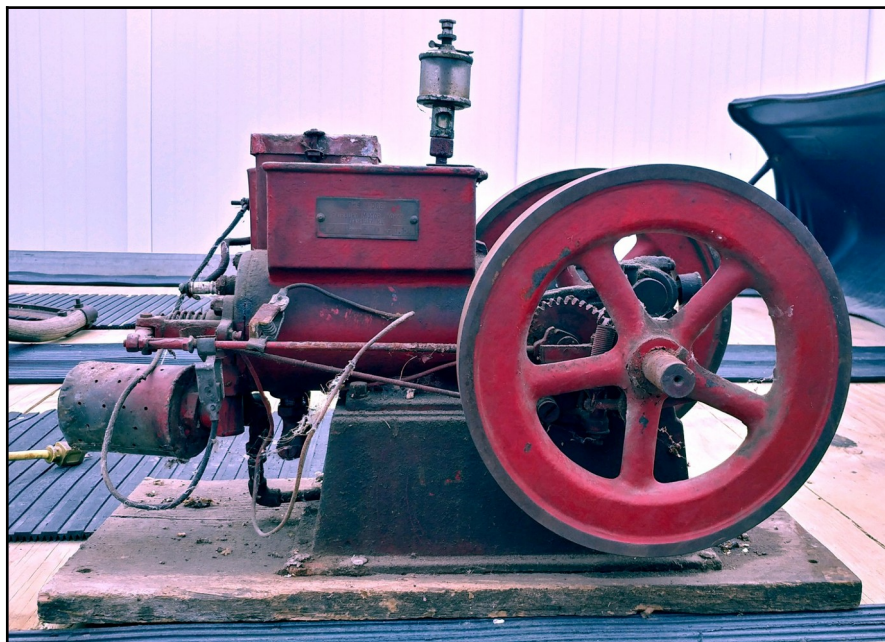
Joseph's body was returned to Fairbury. There was a large funeral at the German Apostolic Church. He was buried at Graceland. His wife never remarried. She moved back to Iowa and died in 1927 at age 42. She is buried in Chariton, Iowa.

In 2016, a collector of hit-and-miss engines in Iowa came across a Midget engine from Fairbury Motor Works. He contacted this reporter seeking historical information about the motor. The collector bought the engine and sent photographs of the engine. There are believed to be only five of these engines left in the world. Two of the engines are in Fairbury, one in Iowa, and two are in Indiana.

Joseph Slagel was a young man with a great deal of promise. It was regrettable that he only lived to be 32 years of age.



*Jos. Slagell*



One of the five known surviving Midget engines manufactured by Joseph Slagel in Fairbury



## **CHAPTER 20**

### **Fairbury Swimming Pool History**

#### **Fairbury Swimming Pool Prepares for 62nd Season**

Before Fairbury had a swimming pool, people often swam in Indian Creek or the Vermilion River. Local sand or gravel pits were also popular swimming spots.

In 1953, the Fairbury Chamber of Commerce organized buses to take Fairbury children over to Pontiac's Humiston swimming pool. As many as 120 children took three school buses a day to the swimming pool in Pontiac.

In early 1957, the Fairbury Jaycees sampled the public opinion regarding the construction of a swimming pool. The citizens and community groups expressed great interest in a swimming pool for Fairbury. As a result, the Fairbury Swimming Pool association was formed. Charles Veatch was named President. Victor Armstrong was appointed Vice-President. The treasurer was William M. Spence, and the Secretary was Mrs. Dean Williams. The five directors of the association were Herbert Lehman, Gerald A. Hill, Herschel Leffingwell, Robert Nussbaum, and Mr. Ashbrook.

In the Summer of 1957, a public fund-raising drive was begun to raise \$60,000. In September of 1957, the Fairbury Community Swimming Pool Association announced they had purchased land to build a new swimming pool. They bought two acres on the west side of First Street just north of the city limits and south of the Everett Crews residence. The ground was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Carter. Joe U. Slagel, the fund-raising chairman, reported that \$42,153 had been pledged. They were still waiting for the three rural solicitors to turn in their donations.

Construction of the new swimming pool started in March of 1958. The new pool was designed to be shaped like a fan. The new pool would be 35 feet wide on the west end and would fan out to be 50 feet wide on the east

end. The new pool would be 82 feet wide. The pool was to be 10 feet deep at the west end. There would be a bathhouse on the east end of the pool.

Construction was resumed in the Spring of 1958. The goal was to have the grand opening of the new pool on Memorial Day. The University of Illinois swim team was scheduled to perform on opening day.

A family season pass, costing \$15, would permit husband, wife, and children under 18 to the pool throughout the season. Individual passes would cost \$6. Daily admission fees would be 50 cents for adults and 30 cents for children under 16.

The grand opening of the new swimming pool was held on Memorial Day, 1958. It was estimated that over 300 citizens attended the event. An hour and ten-minute program by the University of Illinois Swimming team was highlighted by diving exhibitions from the high dive board. On opening day, 274 people swam in the new pool.

The first manager of the swimming pool was Norman Austin, a local school teacher. When Mr. Austin moved to teach at Robinson, the Fairbury Swimming Pool Association appointed George Fyke and Gerry Hart as the new managers of the swimming pool.

As the years went by, maintenance costs at the swimming pool became excessive. When the Fairbury swimming pool was built in 1957-58, it became the second swimming pool in the county. Pontiac's Humiston pool was built in 1919. After the Fairbury pool was built, neighboring towns also constructed swimming pools. These nearby towns included Gridley, Chenoa, Lexington, Chatsworth, and Colfax. These other swimming pools reduced attendance at the Fairbury swimming pool. Many of these pools were plagued by high maintenance costs.

In 1982, Marion Stafford donated 177 acres of farmland in Avoca Township to the Prairie Lands Foundation. She stipulated the proceeds from selling the land be used to construct a new swimming pool and community center. Prairie Lands Foundation sold the land for \$504,450 in 1982. The Fairbury firm of Stoller & Maurer was hired to design the new building complex. The new complex would be named the Floyd and Marion Stafford Community Center.



The original swimming pool was demolished in March of 1983. The new pool was actually two different pools. The main pool was "L" shaped and measured 85 feet on the two outside legs and 45 feet wide on the ends. It was ten feet deep at the deep end and two and a half feet deep on the shallow end. The kiddie pool was ten feet square and one foot deep. The two pools held 150,000 gallons of water.

The support building was 80 by 100 feet and included bathhouses, a snack shop, and a manager's office. It also included space for three future handball and racquetball courts and a weight room.

Construction of the new pool was completed by early August of 1983. Marion Stafford flew back to Fairbury from California for the opening ceremonies. She cut the ribbon on the new swimming pool. Daily attendance at the old pool had fallen to 160 people per day. Attendance at the new pool over the first eight days of operation averaged 420 people.

In 1987, the Boys and Girls Club of Pontiac announced they would change their name to the Boys and Girls Club of Livingston County. They also announced they had leased the Floyd and Marion Stafford Community Center in Fairbury so they could offer their programs to the Fairbury area.

In 1997, Prairie Lands Foundation announced it was donating the Floyd and Marion Stafford Community Center to the City of Fairbury. In 1998, construction started on North Park, adjacent to the swimming pool and Boys and Girls Club.

For the 2019 season, a family pass will be \$125. An individual pass will be \$60. The daily admission rate will be \$4.00 and children under three are free. Swimming pool passes may be purchased at Fairbury's City Hall.



## **CHAPTER 21**

### **Civil War**

#### **Fairbury in the Civil War**

The village of Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad installed their new tracks from Peoria to Indiana. Three years later, in 1860, the population had grown to 262 citizens in the village. There were also about 600 farmers in the three townships that surround Fairbury. This meant the total population of the Fairbury area was approximately 730 citizens.

When Fairbury was founded, an application was made to add a post office for the new town. Somewhere in the post office naming process, an error was made. The original post office was named Fairburg instead of Fairbury. It took a couple of years before the mistake was corrected. When citizens entered the Union Army, their post office name was entered as Fairburg in the military records.

The State of Illinois maintains an excellent database of all Civil War veterans. This database was searched for veterans from Fairbury, Fairburg, Avoca Township, Indian Grove Township, and Belle Prairie Township. The total number of Fairbury area citizens that served in the Civil War was 301.

A total of thirty-one casualties were suffered by Fairbury area soldiers. This meant the Fairbury area casualty rate was about ten percent.

Sixty percent of the Fairbury Civil War soldiers served in just two military units. One hundred seven men served in the 129th Infantry Company E. Ninety men served in the 3rd Cavalry Company K.

The 129th Infantry Company E was commanded by A.J. Cropsey. Almost all of the men in this company were from the Fairbury area. A. J. Cropsey was a pioneer settler in the Fairbury area. He was involved with many of the early land transactions when the village of Fairbury was formed. Cropsey Township and the town of Cropsey are named after him.

The 129th Company E fought primarily in the Confederate states south of Illinois. They were involved with the forty-seven day-long siege of Vicksburg, Tennessee. Their victory at Vicksburg helped to give the Union control of the Mississippi River.

For Company E, the deadliest battle in the Civil War was at Gallatin, Tennessee. Gallatin was strategic because of the railroad and its location on the Cumberland River, both of which the Union Army sought to control. The Confederate Army blew up one of the railroad tunnels. Company E lost six men, and many other soldiers were wounded.

Company E participated in General Sherman's famous March to the Sea campaign. The campaign began with Sherman's troops leaving the captured city of Atlanta on November 15 and ended with the capture of the port of Savannah on December 21. His forces followed a "scorched earth" policy, destroying military targets as well as industry, infrastructure, and civilian property and disrupting the Confederacy's economy and its transportation networks. The operation broke the back of the Confederacy and helped lead to its eventual surrender. Sherman's bold move of operating deep within enemy territory and without supply lines is considered to be one of the major achievements of the war and is also believed to be the early example of modern total war.

When the Civil War ended, Company E went to Washington, D.C. They participated in the military parades celebrating the Union victory. After the big parade, they returned to Fairbury.

The 3rd Cavalry Company K also fought primarily in the Confederate states south of Illinois. They also fought at the siege of Vicksburg. Near the end of the war, they were sent to Minnesota to help resolve some Indian problems. At the end of the Civil War, they were directed to Springfield, Illinois, to muster out of the service.

Fairbury soldiers Isaac Spangler, and Jacob Tucker were held briefly as prisoners of war. Both of them were released as a result of prisoner exchanges with the Confederate Army. Alexander Easton was held as a prisoner of war at the Libby Prison in Richmond. He was also held at a facility at Salisbury, North Carolina.

The worst prisoner of war camp was at Andersonville, Georgia. The Confederacy could not provide enough food for their fighting soldiers, let alone enough food for their prisoners of war. Records indicate about 30% of the Union Soldiers held there died from starvation and disease. Fairbury area soldiers Pulaski Mussey, James Wright, and Alexander Easton were all held at Andersonville Prison.

After the Civil War ended, Andersonville Commander Henry Wirz was charged with war crimes. He was the only person in the Civil War accused of war crimes. Fairbury soldier James Wright served as a witness against Henry Wirz at his trial in Washington, D.C. Commander Henry Wirz was found guilty and hung.

During the Civil War, it was an acceptable practice to pay a substitute for taking your place as a soldier in the Union Army. In the 1888 history book, it is noted that Aaron Becker, Belle Prairie Township, paid \$1,000 in 1863 for a substitute to take his place in the Union Army. That would be equivalent to \$20,230 in 2019 dollars. Substitutes did not collect the \$1,000 until after the war.

The two Putnam brothers, George and Henry, were both supposed to serve in the Union Army as substitutes. Neither one made it to their assigned Union military units. Their father reported them both killed in the Civil War in the 1878 history book and in his obituary. It is still a mystery what happened to the two brothers from Belle Prairie Township south of Fairbury.

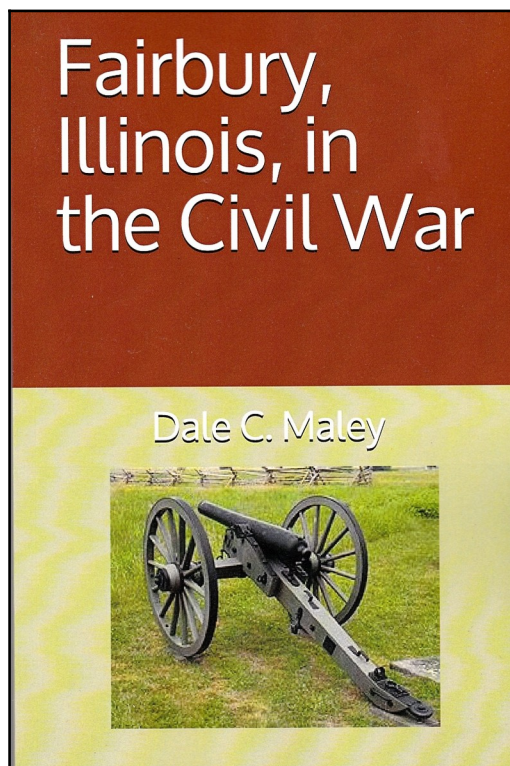
The battle called the Massacre at Fort Pillow was a very controversial battle. The Union Army that surrendered to the Confederates was mostly black soldiers. It was alleged the Confederates massacred all the Union soldiers, even when they tried to surrender.

Fairbury soldier James T. Ayers started out in the 129th Infantry Company E. He was then given a new assignment to recruit former slaves into the Union Army. He wrote a poem about the Fort Pillow Massacre which he then used as a recruiting tool. Ayers requested a leave from the war because he was sick and his daughter in Fairbury was expecting a baby. Ayers left the battle at Chattanooga and went for a visit to Fairbury. After

delivering a baby girl, his daughter was on her deathbed. He wrote a poem of prayer to help his dying daughter. Both his daughter and his new granddaughter survived and lived full lives after the war.

The 1878 Livingston County history book also recounts the tale of Fairbury soldier Samuel Greenbaum. It reported that as a trophy of the war, we find Mr. Greenbaum carrying back from Richmond to Yankeedom, a bride. His bride was Miss Henrietta Kayton, daughter of Henry and Caroline Kayton, residents of Baltimore, formerly of Norfolk. Their marriage was celebrated in Richmond. Mr. Greenbaum and his new wife must have gotten along pretty well because they had six children.

For more information about Fairbury and the Civil War, see the book titled ***Fairbury, Illinois in the Civil War***. Copies can be borrowed from the Dominy Library or purchased at the Walton Centre.



## **CHAPTER 22**

### **World War I**

#### **Fairbury and World War I**

Just over 100 years ago, Fairbury men and women got involved in the first world-wide war. America did not enter World War I until April 6, 1917. This was a relatively short war that ended in just 19 months. WWI officially ended on November 11, 1918.

It often took over one year just to ramp up the war effort. Because this war was relatively short, few veterans from Fairbury arrived in Europe before the war ended. In fact, most Fairbury soldiers reached England by boat about the time the war was over. Upon arriving in Europe, most were almost immediately sent back home because the war was already over.

A total of 301 men and women from the Fairbury-Cropsey area served in WWI. Of those, 296 were male, and five were female nurses. Fifteen men died in World War I. Fourteen were from Fairbury, and one from Cropsey. This represents a death rate of 5% (15 fatalities divided by 301 total veterans).

Of the fifteen men who died, ten died of illness. This was the time of the great world-wide influenza pandemic. The Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, the deadliest in history, infected an estimated 500 million people worldwide—about one-third of the planet's population. This pandemic killed an estimated 20 million to 50 million victims, including some 675,000 Americans.

This was the first global war that used very sinister weapons. Soldiers encountered H.E. or high explosive shells, machine guns, and mustard gas. Only 16% of the veterans actually fought in Europe. Of the men who fought in Europe, 16% were gassed. One died from being gassed. Five men were inducted into the military but were rejected at basic training camp.

The population in Fairbury in 1918 was about 2,500. If we assume half were male, this means a total male population of 1,250. This means about 24% of the male population served in WWI.

The primary reference book about Fairbury WWI veterans was published circa 1922. It is titled *Livingston County in the World War*. It contains a short military service record for each Livingston County veteran. Photographs are only included if the soldier perished during the war.

One sad story is the case of young William Eckhart from Weston. He went to Fairbury schools and went into the service in May of 1918. His commanding officer sent a message to William's parents back in Weston. He told them their son had the flu and now had pneumonia. Mr. Eckhart left immediately for Texas. He arrived at Fort Bliss the next morning at 9 am. He got to talk to his son 30 minutes before he passed away at 9:30 am.

Another sobering story is Fred Weaver Churchill. He and his brother Woodford McDowell Churchill both served in WWI. Fred was sent to France. He was severely gassed in France on October 14, 1918. He survived the initial gas attack and was shipped back home to Fairbury. He died six years later in 1924. His obituary noted that he never fully recovered from the gas attack in France.

Thomas Wade Harris (1890-1918) was a Fairbury coal miner. He was inducted into the military on September 19, 1917. He died at Camp Logan in Texas from heart trouble. His nephew, Thomas Wade Harris (1924-1993), served in World War II. He was shot down over Germany during WWII and was a POW. He survived the war and returned to Fairbury.

The only Fairbury man to serve in both WWI and WWII was Lee Garber. He was a college professor for most of his life.

John J. Joda was a 24-year-old plumber when he was inducted into the military in April of 1918. He was shipped to France and fought in the St. Mihiel Offensive. He was killed in action on September 14, 1918, by a high explosive shell. The American Legion post in Fairbury is named after him.



Five young Fairbury women served as nurses in WWI. Francis Anne Bodley-Maley did her basic training at Camp Grant in Rockford. She was then assigned to Army Hospital Number 32 in Chicago for the duration of the war. After the war, she later became the Livingston County Nurse. Mary A. Joda did her basic training at Camp Grant. She remained at Camp Grant for the duration of the war.

Rachael Olson did her basic training at Camp Custer. She then served at the Reconstruction Hospital in Detroit, Michigan.

Mrs. Lillian Watts did her basic training at Vancouver Barracks and remained there for the duration of the war.

Frances Monch was the fifth Fairbury woman to serve as a nurse in WWI. After the war, she moved back to Fairbury.

There is a brass monument plaque in Central Park which lists all of the Fairbury WWI veterans. This monument includes the five Fairbury women who served as nurses in that war.

In 2018, a new book was published titled ***Fairbury, Illinois in the World Wars***. It includes information about all the men and women who served in both World War I and World War II. Copies of this book can be borrowed from the Fairbury Dominy Library. Printed books can be purchased at the Walton Centre in Fairbury.

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# Fairbury, Illinois in the World Wars

Dale Maley



JOHN W. GEE  
Entered Army Air Force, December 18, 1941 at Peoria,  
Illinois.  
Served in European-African-Middle Eastern Theater.  
Battles and Campaigns: Naples-Foggia, Po Valley, and  
Gothic.  
Received Air Medal with Silver Cluster and Distinguished  
Flying Cross.  
Discharged December 16, 1945 at Drew Field, Florida as  
Captain.

Copyrighted Material

## **CHAPTER 23**

### **World War II**

#### **Fairbury and World War II**

The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in 1941 led to America entering World War II. The Allied forces were the Americans, British, Russians, and Chinese. The Axis forces were the Germans, Italians, and Japanese. For the Americans, this war lasted four years until it concluded in 1945.

A total of 354 men and women from the Fairbury-Cropsey area served in WWII. Of those, 345 were male, and 9 were female nurses.

Thirty men died in World War II. This represented a death rate of 9%. The population in Fairbury in 1940 was about 2,300. If we assume half were male, this means a total male population of 1,150. This means about 30% of the men in the Fairbury area served in WWII.

There were two Fairbury area men that were held as Prisoners of War in Germany. The first was Thomas "Wade" Harris (1924 - 1993). His plane was shot down over Germany. As the Allied forces started to move into Germany, he was transferred to several different POW camps in Germany. Wade recounted one story about his time as a POW in Germany. In his prison camp, there were soldiers from many different countries. Of the different soldier nationalities, the Germans disliked the Russian soldiers the most. Therefore, the Germans made the Russians clean the camp latrines every day. The Germans did allow the Russians to use a vacuum tank and hose to clean the latrines. A low-grade fuel was burned in the tank to create a vacuum to draw the material into the container.

The Russians really did not like the latrine cleaning assignment. They developed a plan to end this assignment. One day, they intentionally used a much more flammable grade of fuel in the vacuum tank. They filled the tank with the more volatile fuel, lit it, and quickly moved away from it. The tank exploded. All of the Russian soldiers cheered the results of their scheme. The soldiers from other countries cheered as well. Unfortunately,

their jubilation period only lasted one day. The next day after the explosion, the Germans forced the Russians to clean the latrines with their bare hands.

After the war, Wade Harris returned to Fairbury. He lived a normal life after the war. He worked many years as a plumber for Dameron Plumbing in Fairbury.

The second Prisoner of War was Dwight Seale. Unfortunately, Dwight Seale did not live a normal life. After the war, he married and moved to Tacoma, WA. At the age of 42, he went missing at American Lake outside Tacoma. He was presumed to have drowned. Then his wife died one year later.

When World War II started, the five Sullivan brothers all decided to enlist in the Navy at the same time. When they went to the Navy recruiting station, the recruiter told them the Navy did not like that many members of the same family serving together. The Sullivans told the recruiter they would not enlist unless the Navy took all five brothers. The recruiter decided to take all five brothers into the U.S. Navy.

Unfortunately, their ship was sunk during the war, and all five brothers were killed. In their honor, the Navy launched a new ship named the USS Sullivans.

A Fairbury man, Glenn Lee Johnson, was a sailor assigned to the new ship, the USS Sullivans. The Captain of the USS Sullivans send a few men on a small boat to check out a nearby small island. When they reached the island, the crew left Glenn in charge of the small boat. The rest of the men scouted the island. When they returned, the small boat was still there, but no sign of Glenn.

They searched for Glenn a couple of days, and finally gave up. He was declared missing in action. One year later, he was officially declared dead. A local descendant was recently watching an episode of the ***Mysteries at the Museum*** television show. That episode was about the Kissing Sailor, George Mendonsa.

At the end of WWII, there was a famous photo on the cover of Life Magazine. It depicted a young sailor grabbing a nurse in New York City and kissing her. Many experts believe the kissing sailor was George Mendonsa.

The local descendant noticed the Kissing Sailor had a baseball style cap with the USS Sullivans on it. She knew that was Glenn Lee Johnson's boat in WWII. She did a Google search and found a 2005 oral history transcript done by George Mendonsa. The local descendant wrote to George Mendonsa, and he called her back. He said that he remembered Johnson, he was on the small crew that went to the island that day.

Mendonsa also said that after the war, they found Johnson's remains. He had been stabbed. He said there must have been Japanese on that island that they did not see. George Mendonsa passed away in February of 2019. Another writer is writing a new book about The USS Sullivans. He recounted that Glenn Johnson was the only sailor the ship lost the entire time it was on duty during WWII. The local descendant of Glenn Lee Johnson provided information about Glenn that will be included in the new book about the USS Sullivans.

In May of 1945, near the end of the war, Bob Hope did a military benefit show at the Birmingham Army hospital in San Fernando, California. During this show, he talked about three minutes to Julia Flanagan, a nurse from Fairbury, Illinois. Bob's benefit was recorded and broadcast on the radio in 1945. A copy of this 74-year-old amusing recording can be heard on the Internet at <http://tinyurl.com/hhhfls8>.

In 2018, a new book was published titled *Fairbury, Illinois in the World Wars* by Dale C. Maley. It includes information about all the men and women who served in both World War I and World War II. Copies of this book can be borrowed from the Fairbury Dominy Library. Printed books can be purchased at the Walton Centre in Fairbury.



JOHN W. GEE

Entered Army Air Force, December 18, 1941 at Peoria, Illinois.

Served in European-African-Middle Eastern Theatre.  
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## **CHAPTER 24**

### **Fairbury Banks**

#### **Fairbury Banking History**

The accompanying flow charts show the evolution of Fairbury's banks and the building and loan association.

In 1864, Fairbury's first bank was formed. It was called the Fairbury Bank, and it was created by Judge Woodford G. McDowell and Nathan E. Lyman.

Judge Woodford G. McDowell was one of the pioneer settlers in the Fairbury area. He was a self-taught lawyer, similar to Abraham Lincoln. He was elected a Livingston County Judge. Judge McDowell also traveled to Nebraska and established the town of Fairbury, Nebraska. Nathan E. Lyman later moved to Rockford and lived the rest of his life there.

In 1874, Fairbury's second bank was founded. The second bank was named Bartlett, Beach & Dominy. Thomas A. Beach was likely the wealthiest citizen to ever live in Fairbury. At his death, it is estimated he was worth \$50 million in today's dollars. His home often called the "Lion House," still stands on East Hickory Street.

Lorenzo Beach Dominy was another wealthy early Fairbury citizen. He was a nephew of Thomas A. Beach. When his daughter Hazel Dominy died unexpectedly at only seventeen years of age, Lorenzo Dominy and his wife decided to build a library in honor of his daughter. Today, this is the Dominy Memorial Library.

Isaac Walton and his brother John Wesley Walton started their first store in Fairbury in 1868. In 1902, J. W. Walton decided to add a bank to their department store. It remained in operation until 1923. When Walton's department store burned for the third time in 1923, they needed to raise money to build a new store. The Walton Banking Company was sold to raise cash for the new building.

In 1927, the citizens of Fairbury were shocked to learn the Claudon Bank had failed. This story started with the mysterious poisoning of A. B. Claudon Jr. He was the son of the bank founder and the Cashier. The public got so nervous about this strange illness that the board ordered an audit by state bank examiners. The bank Cashier died, and the auditors found significant problems with the bank. Another son of the bank founder was charged with accepting deposits after the bank was closed. A subsequent trial exonerated this son. The founder of this bank, A. B. Claudon, fled Fairbury fearing he would be arrested. After a four-year nationwide manhunt, he was found and arrested in St. Louis in 1931. He apparently served no prison time because he died at his son's home in Fairbury in 1932. Depositors eventually received 45% of their money back. At this point, there were only two banks left operating in Fairbury.

Modern banks all operate under the fractional reserve system. The banks seek investors to deposit their savings in the bank. The banks pay interest to their depositors. The bank loans most of the money received from depositors. The bank keeps a small fraction of its total deposits in reserves to pay people who decide to withdraw their money. The bank makes a profit if the interest received from its loans exceeds the interest paid to depositors. This whole system is based upon investors having confidence in the bank. If the investors lose faith in the bank, they all demand their money immediately from the bank. Since the bank cannot convert its loans quickly to cash, a "run on the bank" occurs, and the bank has to shut down.

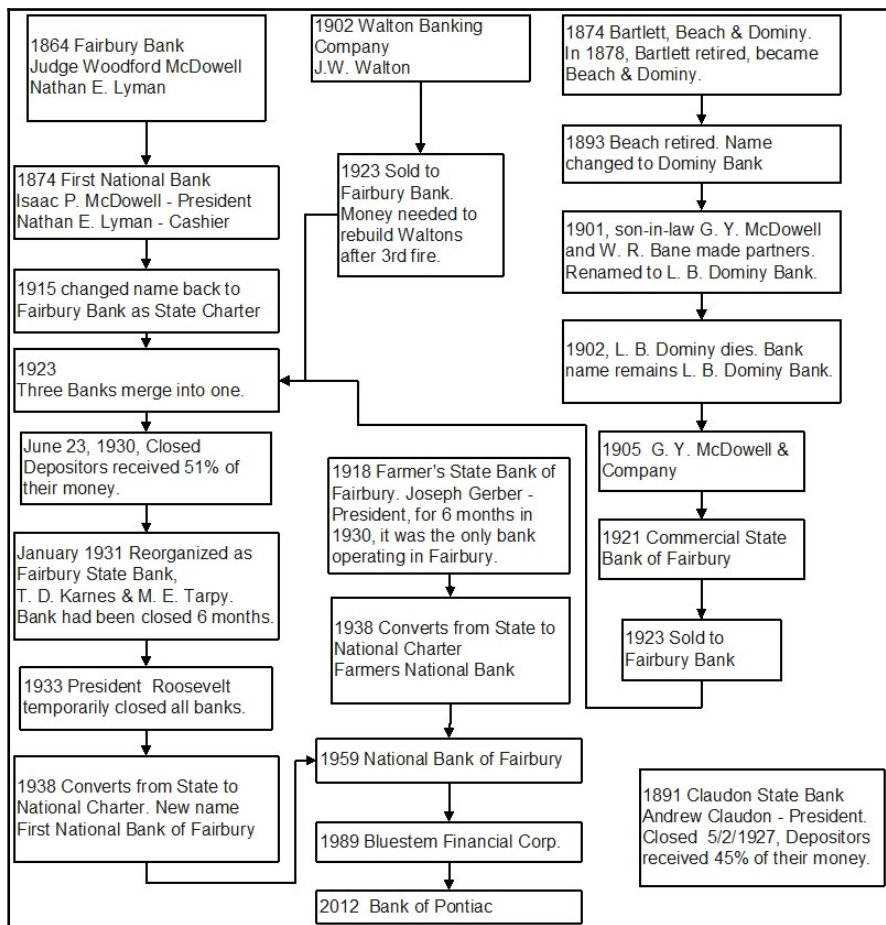
The Great Depression started in 1929. Investors across the country lost confidence in the banks. In June of 1930, the largest bank in Fairbury, the Fairbury Bank, closed its doors. Depositors eventually received 51% of their money back. For the rest of 1930, Fairbury only had one bank operating, the Farmer's State Bank of Fairbury.

Fairbury citizens became very nervous after the largest bank in town failed. They started a bank run on the sole remaining bank in Fairbury, the Farmer's State Bank. To try to stem the bank run, bank officials called a big bank in Chicago and asked for several large bags of money. A large black limousine pulled up in front of the bank, and armed guards with shotguns escorted the bags of money into the bank. The guards remained in the bank lobby for several days guarding the cash. The bank run ended after one and a half days.



In 1933, President Roosevelt temporarily closed all banks in the country. This temporary closure was called a "bank holiday." The Emergency Banking Act legislation was passed which created deposit insurance for all bank investors. All banks had to be audited by federal bank examiners before they could reopen. It took eight weeks for the Farmer's State Bank to fully resume all operations.

Today, Fairbury is served by the Bank of Pontiac, Busey Bank, and many banking branches from other local community banks.





1872 Bank Note issued by the First National Bank of Fairbury

## **CHAPTER 25**

### **Fairbury School History**

#### **History of Fairbury Schools**

According to William Le Baron's 1878 book, *The History of Livingston County*, Alonzo Straight taught the first school classes in Fairbury. He conducted his classes in a small existing building on the south side of the T. P. & W. Railroad.

The first structure built specifically as a school was built in 1860, at the northwest corner of Fourth and Maple Streets. Smith Olney was the first teacher in this building. It was a two-story frame structure, and the cost was \$2,500. This would be equivalent to \$70,600 in today's dollars.

The second structure built as a school was the South Side School House. It was built in 1868 at the northeast corner of Fourth Street and Route 24. It was also a two-story frame building, and its cost was \$3,500. This would be equivalent to \$66,700 in today's dollars.

In 1878, the teachers at these two schools were: Prof. C. H. Rew, Principal of the High School Department; Miss M. M. Daly, Assistant in the High School Department; Miss Ella B. Erwin, Teacher of the Second Grammar Department; Philip Hutchinson, Teacher of the First Grammar Department; Miss Della Chesebrough, Teacher of the Second Intermediate; Miss Cynthia E. Earnhart, Teacher of the First Intermediate; Miss Laura Colvin, Teacher of the Second Primary; Miss Anna E. McDowell, Teacher of the South Primary; Mrs. S. M. Hempstead, Teacher of the North Primary; Miss Mary Kilbury, Teacher of the West Primary and Intermediate School.

In 1880, the South Side School was built using a brick structure. The construction cost was \$13,000. This would be equivalent to \$342,000 in today's dollars. This brick school was built at the same location as the former frame structure and was designed for a maximum capacity of 400 students.

In 1892, the high school diploma granted to Jesse Frances Ramsey had an illustration of the brick school at the northeast corner of Fourth Street and Route 24.

In 1895, the frame structure school building at the northwest corner of Fourth and Maple Streets was sold to Dr. Brewer. At the same site, the new Fairbury High School was built using a brick structure.

Around 1900, a large meteorite that had fallen south of Fairbury was moved to the north playground area of the South Side School. Ed Lovett, school Custodian and his brother-in-law Ed Moore, hired Bob Harris, house-mover, to haul the rock to the schoolyard. The meteorite was sixteen inches high and thirty-six inches in diameter. According to an October 1958 Blade article, Dean Voorhees investigated and determined that if this were really a meteorite, it would be the largest ever found in the United States.

In 1913, the high school diploma granted to Aldine Hanna had an illustration of the brick school at the northwest corner of Fourth and Maple Streets.

In 1914, a new brick structure was built on North Seventh Street. It was named the Fairbury Township High School. It was completed in time for the 1914-1915 school year. The June 11, 1915, Blade noted that on a Friday night, pupils at the new high school building painted the numerals "15," being the numerals of this year's graduating class of the school, on the building. They were painted in red over the main entrance and also on the concrete sidewalk in front of the main entrance. On the invitation of the school superintendent, members of the class removed the decorations Saturday.

After the new high school was placed in service, the other two brick schools were named the North and South Side Schools. Apparently, citizens thought fancier names were needed for these two grade schools. A city-wide naming contest was held in May of 1918. The winners of the naming contest were Isaac Walton for the North Side school and Edison for the South Side School. Isaac Walton donated \$1,000, so the school's manual training department could purchase machinery for the students to use. When Isaac Walton died in 1913, in his will, he left another \$1,000

for the manual training department. Today, we would call this the Industrial Arts department.

Thomas Edison was a famous inventor known for inventing the light bulb and many other devices. The other less popular names were Washington, Lincoln, and Betsy Ross.

By the late 1940s, mechanization had eliminated the need for a large number of farmers and their children to cultivate the fields. This led to the closing of the country schools and consolidation of schools. In 1949, the citizens of Fairbury and Cropsey voted to consolidate their schools. The name of the high school was changed to Fairbury-Cropsey High School.

The post World War II Baby Boom created a massive number of school-age children. By the 1960s, Fairbury's two grade schools were nearing the end of their useful lives. In 1964, Westview grade school was built on south First Street. In 1965, Edison School was closed and sold. The building was torn down, and an apartment building now occupies that location. The current location of the school bell and meteorite are unknown.

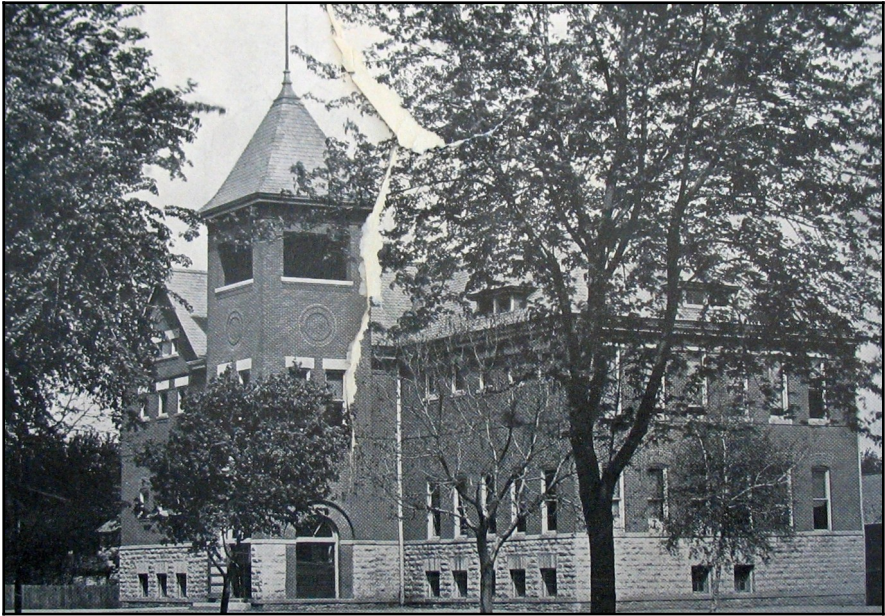
1972 was the last year of classes for Isaac Walton grade school. It was torn down in 1974 and is now the Methodist Church parking lot. The school bell was saved by Jack Tollensdorf. He eventually donated it to Central Park in Fairbury, where it is on permanent display.

In 1985, the Prairie Central School district was formed through a consolidation vote. It combined the Fairbury-Cropsey, Forrest, and Chatsworth schools. A few years later, Chenoa was added to the Prairie Central system.

In 1997, after eighty-three years of service, the old Fairbury Township High School building was torn down.

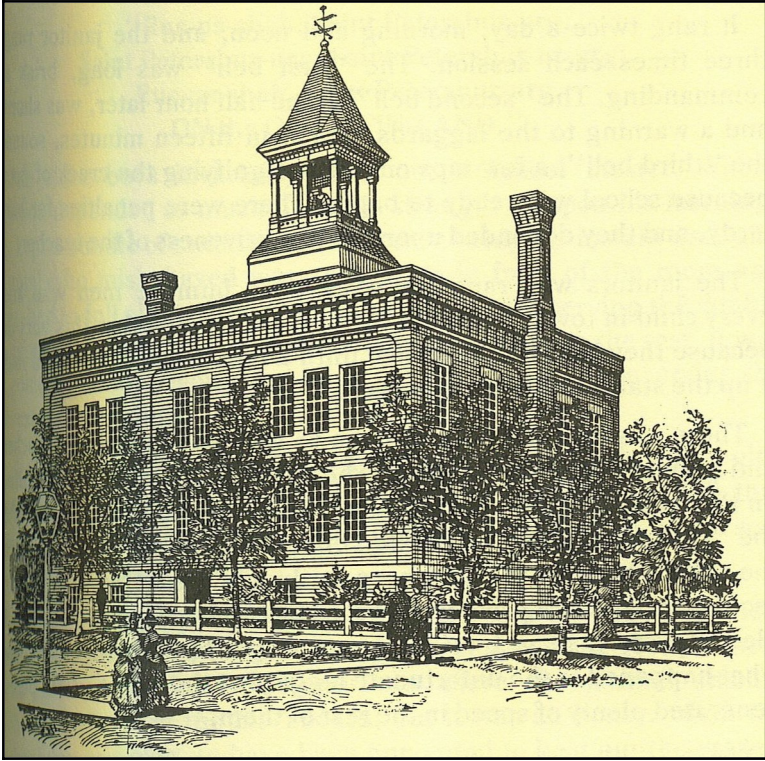
Many current Fairbury residents have fond memories of sliding down the tubular fire escapes at Isaac Walton, Edison, and the old high school. Many people who attended Edison School remember the funny looking meteorite in the playground area.

It is likely the school facilities in Fairbury will continue to adapt as existing structures reach the end of their useful lives, and the number of students served changes in future years.



Isaac Walton





Edison School



Fairbury Township High School



## Early Fairbury School History

**1868**

-South Side School Built  
-Source: Goodrich Book  
-Location: N.E. Corner of 4th & Route 24



**1880**

-South Side Brick School Built  
-\$13,000 Cost  
-\$335,200 in 2017 Dollars  
-Source: Aug. 28, 1880 Pantagraph



**1918**

-Name Changed to Edison  
-Source: May 31, 1918, Blade



**1965**

-Building sold  
-Eventually torn down & Weber Apartment building built  
-Source: Goodrich Book

**1860**

-Fairbury High School Built. Frame building.  
-Source: 1878 History Book  
-Location: N.W. Corner of 4th and Maple



**1895**

-Frame Building Sold to Dr. Brewer  
-Fairbury High School Brick Building Built  
-Source: May 18, 1895 Blade



**1914**

-Name changed to North Side School  
-Source: May 31, 1918 Blade



**1918**

-Name Changed to Isaac Walton  
-Source: May 31, 1918, Blade



**1965**

-Building sold  
-Bell saved  
-Eventually torn down & converted to Methodist Church parking lot.  
-Source: Goodrich Book

**1914**

-Brick High School Built  
-Source: Goodrich Book  
-Location: North 7th Street



## **CHAPTER 26**

### **Fairbury Country Schools**

#### **Fairbury Area Country Schools**

Many farmers poured into the Fairbury area in the 1850s. Because farming in those days was so labor intensive, farmers often could not farm more than forty or eighty acres. These farmers often had many children so they could help with the farm work.

Country schools were established to educate all of these farm children. The theory was that children should not have to walk more than one mile to school. This goal resulted in country schools being located every two miles. The schools were often named after the farmer who owned the land where the country school was erected.

By 1897, there were over 6,000 school-age children in rural areas. This led to the establishment of 299 country schools in Livingston County. Each of these schools averaged between ten and twenty students.

The Fairbury rural area included Avoca, Indian Grove, and Belle Prairie townships. Seventeen country schools were constructed to educate the children from these townships.

The design of the country schools in the Fairbury area was similar, with some variations. Most of these buildings had one large classroom, with a small vestibule room attached to it. For example, the Pearson School north of Fairbury had one large room that measured thirty feet by twenty-four and a half feet. The small adjoined vestibule room measured fourteen feet by ten feet. Since the classroom was the large room, these were often called one-room schoolhouses.

Many of these schools used a stacked limestone rock foundation approximately one foot tall. Often a large wood beam was set on top of the rock foundation. The large beam was notched to hold the wood floor joists. Most of these schoolhouses had wood floors, plastered walls, and large chalkboards.

Initially, one wood-burning stove was used to heat the building. In later years, coal instead of wood was used as fuel. The students and the teacher often cooked their lunch food on top of the wood stove. Since these buildings usually were not insulated in the walls or ceilings, they were probably difficult to keep warm in the cold winter months.

Some of the country schools had a separate outhouse building. Others had a toilet in the small vestibule room. Most of these schools had an outside well with a hand pump for the water supply. Some of the schools got electricity in the 1930s. The children would listen to educational programs on the radio. They would also record grain prices. When they got home after school, they would report the grain prices to their father.

One school teacher taught grades one through eight in each school. The older students would often help the younger students with their reading, writing, or arithmetic assignments. Starting in the 1890s, a countywide eighth-grade graduation ceremony was held at Pontiac in Chautauqua Park. During the hard times of the 1930s, the budgets were cut for the country schools, and some eighth graders had their diploma mailed to them instead of the graduation ceremony at Chautauqua Park. After graduation, the students attended high school in Fairbury.

The country school students played a lot of softball and a game called Andy High Over. This game was basically volleyball, with the roof of the one-room schoolhouse being the net. The students split into two teams, one for each side of the building. One team would hit a rubber ball over the peak of the roof, and the other team had to return it. The teacher usually played in the game, and it instilled a sense of teamwork in the students.

Most of the teachers at the country schools attended two years at the Illinois State Normal University. In 1967, the name of this college was changed to Illinois State University.

In the Fairbury area country schools, the two most significant events of the year were the Christmas Party and the end-of-year literary and track meet. At the literary and track meet, students from other Fairbury area country schools were invited to compete. The fathers helped conduct outdoors

track events. Blue, red, and white ribbons were awarded to the top three finishers.

Once the outdoor events were concluded, the students moved into the schoolhouse for the educational contests. These included spelling and math problems. The mothers helped conduct the educational games.

Farm mechanization dramatically reduced the amount of labor required on the farms. The number of farmers with their large families was no longer needed. The number of rural students in Livingston County peaked in 1897 at 6,000 students. By 1922, the number of students dropped to 3,400. This drop in enrollment continued, and by 1947, there were only 1,522 students. With 299 country schools, the average enrollment at each school dropped to only about five students.

Country schools started to close and consolidate during the 1930s because of lower enrollments and the hard times of the Great Depression. This closure rate accelerated in the 1940s, and by 1950 all the country schools in Livingston County were closed. The 1949-1950 school year was the last one for the Fairbury area country schools.

The country schools were usually sold after they closed. Some were converted to houses and some to farm machine sheds. Many of them were eventually torn down. There are at least two country schools in the Fairbury area which have been restored to their original conditions. One is the 1860 Phelps schoolhouse which was moved to Spence Farms south of Fairbury. Recently, a Chatsworth area schoolhouse was moved to downtown Chatsworth.

Since the last country schools in Livingston County closed in 1950, a first-grade student in 1949 would now be about 75 years old. Many people in this generation have fond memories of the time they spent in the country schools.

Note: The photo below is the Lodemia Country School located northwest of Fairbury in about 1907.



## CHAPTER 27

### **Bat Masterson Working in Fairbury Coal Mine**

#### **Debunking the Bat Masterson Myth**

One of the most interesting Fairbury history tales is the one about Bat Masterson working in the Fairbury coal mines. Bat Masterson is most famous for being a gunfighter and sheriff in Dodge City, Kansas.

An exhaustive study was done to determine how this story first got started. It all traces back to a March 27, 1952 article in the Blade. This article was titled ***Roots of Fairbury Buried Deeply in Coal Mines***. The reporter that wrote this article reported that a Fairbury coal miner had told Mr. R. A. McAllister that Bat Masterson worked briefly in the Marsh coal mine. The reporter also said that Mr. McAllister was the primary source for the coal mining information in the article.

Upon his death in 1967, the Blade reported that Richard A. McAllister was a colorful and sometimes controversial figure in Fairbury history. As a young man, McAllister worked in the Fairbury coal mines. He was a physically big man and played professional football before any formal leagues existed. Later in life, he was an Alderman and was the Postmaster of Fairbury.

In 1958, a new television show debuted called ***Bat Masterson***. It was an American Western television series which showed a fictionalized account of the life of real-life marshal/gambler/dandy Bat Masterson. The title character was played by Gene Barry and the half-hour black-and-white shows ran on NBC from 1958 to 1961. The series was produced by Ziv Television Productions.

In 1962, the popularity of the television show prompted the Blade to publish a story about Bat Masterson working in the Fairbury coal mines. The story was titled ***Is it Legend? Rumor Reports that Bat Masterson Once Worked in Marsh Coal Mines***. This Blade story quoted R. A. McAllister again, "I never actually saw him, but the word is that he worked at the Marsh Mines west of town." This story said that around

1902, Bat was forced to leave Denver. The Blade reporter speculated that maybe Bat stopped at Fairbury on his way from Denver to New York.

In March of 1976, the Pontiac Daily Leader did a series of historical stories about local towns in honor of the nation's bicentennial. For Fairbury history, they published a photograph of a group of coal miners and the above-ground mine building. The photo caption was, "Bat Masterson, center rear of the photo, worked for Marsh in the mine for several years before he went to Dodge City and became a famous United States Marshall. He was remembered because, unlike the other miners, he was always well dressed and quiet mannered."

The man purported to be Bat Masterson in the photo is an older adult man. The quality of the photograph is not good enough to verify it is Bat Masterson. No source is given for the picture or the information about Bat Masterson. It is likely the information was provided by Alma Lewis James.

In 1977, Alma Lewis James released the second edition of her book, *Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars*. In this edition, she added the story that Bat Masterson worked in the Fairbury coal mines. She used the exact same wording as was used in the 1976 Leader photograph caption.

Around this time, someone had postcards printed showing the same photograph as the 1976 Leader story. The postcard had the exact same wording as the Leader mining photograph.

Lee Garber was a native of Fairbury who went on to become a University Professor. In 1982, the Pantagraph ran an article about his retirement. In this article, Garber said he was researching the issue of whether Bat Masterson really worked in the Fairbury coal mines.

In his 1986 Blade editorial column, Jim Roberts noted that Lee Garber was unable to substantiate that Bat Masterson worked in the Fairbury coal mines. Lee Garber spent four years researching this question before he died in 1986.

In 2014, after years of research, Robert K. DeArment published his book *Bat Masterson: The Man and the Legend*. At the beginning of his book,



DeArment notes that almost everything published about Bat Masterson in the 1870s and 1880s was incorrect. East Coast newspaper reporters embellished their stories to try to satisfy the insatiable public appetite for wild west stories. Many stories were published that Bat was born in Illinois.

DeArment found that Bat Masterson was actually born on November 26, 1853, in Quebec, Canada. His baptismal record is still on file at St. George parish.

In 1861, the Masterson family started a ten-year trek from Canada to Sedgwick County, Kansas. Very little is known about the various stops the family made on this journey.

In 1871, Bat's father bought farmland in Sedgwick County. His father lived on this farm until he died in 1921. In 1871, Bat was eighteen years old. He and his brother Ed left the family home and decided to become buffalo hunters.

After several years of buffalo hunting, Bat was appointed Deputy Sheriff for Ford County by Sheriff Charlie Bassett. On November 6, 1877, twenty days before his twenty-fourth birthday, Bat Masterson ran and was elected Sheriff of Ford County.

During the next ten years, Bat served as a lawman in various locations. Extensive newspaper reporting of his adventures made him nationally famous.

Bat became interested in heavyweight boxing in the late 1880s. Author DeArment noted that from the year 1889 until the day of his death, there was scarcely a major heavyweight prizefight in the United States that Bat Masterson did not witness. During the 1890s, his role was frequently more than that of a mere spectator, however; he was often directly involved in the promotions. In 1889, he served as a special bodyguard to Jake Kilrain and Charlie Mitchell when Kilrain arrived in New Orleans to meet John L. Sullivan for the title.

On April 18, 1899, the Olympic Athletic Club was founded, W. B. Masterson, President. Bat leased the Haymarket Theater, formerly the

Academy of Music, an old building on the corner of Sixteenth and Market streets, and called in architects to begin alterations. "I expect to get the best men in the ring in Denver," he was quoted in the Republican.

Bat moved to New York City in 1902 and spent the rest of his life there as a reporter and columnist for the New York Morning Telegraph. Masterson's newspaper column not only covered boxing and other sports, but frequently gave his opinions on crime, war, politics, and other topics as well. He became a close friend of President Theodore Roosevelt. Bat died while working at his reporting desk in 1921.

If Bat Masterson worked at a Fairbury coal mine before he started his buffalo hunting and lawman career, he would have been between eight and eighteen years of age. This does not match the mining photograph, which shows an older adult male. It also does not match the description of Bat Masterson given in the caption of the mining photograph.

It is also very doubtful that Bat Masterson stopped in Fairbury when he moved from Denver to New York in 1902. At that time, Bat was nationally famous as a lawman. He was also very well known as a promoter of heavyweight boxing matches. He was so renowned that a New York newspaper gave him a job as a sports columnist. Bat did not need to take a coal mining job in Fairbury.

There was a Masterson family that lived in Fairbury. A genealogical review found there was no connection between this family and Bat Masterson's family.

Based on the facts, it is highly improbable that Bat Masterson actually worked in a Fairbury coal mine.



Bat Masterson in 1879



## **CHAPTER 28**

### **Conerus Cigars**

#### **John Conerus: Fairbury Cigar Maker**

John Conerus was born in Germany on August 24, 1843. His parents were Liborius C. Conerus and Taalke M. Sies. John's family was relatively large, with approximate twelve children.

John Conerus got married in Germany at the age of 26. He married Lisette Gathemann, who was also from Germany. John learned the cigar manufacturing trade in Germany. While in Germany, John and his wife had two daughters. They were Marie Antoinette and Frances Augusta Conerus.

In 1873, John Conerus and his family moved to Aurora, Illinois. He set up cigar making operations in Aurora. That year, his first son, William Christian Conerus, was born in May of 1873. In 1875, his third daughter, Anna Conerus, was born in Aurora. A second son, John H. Conerus, was born in 1877. Unfortunately, this son died one year later in 1878. A third son, John Paul Conerus, was born in 1880.

Judge Woodford G. McDowell was one of the first settlers in the Fairbury area. Judge McDowell and his brother went to Nebraska and established the new town of Fairbury, Nebraska, in 1873. Several people from Fairbury, Illinois, moved to Fairbury, Nebraska.

While John Conerus was living in Aurora, in 1876, his brother Gehrhard (Henry) Conerus moved from Germany to live in Aurora also. He was also a cigar maker. Henry spent the rest of his life in Aurora.

In March of 1881, John Conerus moved his family from Aurora to Fairbury. He set up his cigar making operation in Fairbury. His cigar factory was in the second story of the building at the northeast corner of Fourth and Locust Streets in Fairbury. The first story of this building is now the Lost-in-Time restaurant. His cigar brands included Fumers, Park,

No. 5, Progresso, Wild Oats, Maud S., Wabash, St. Louis, Pacific, and Fan Tail. He produced upwards of 6,000 hand-rolled cigars per week.

Fairbury was a booming town in the 1880s, and there were many saloons to quench the thirst of all those coal miners. These saloons were a good market for the cigars made by John Conerus.

In 1884, Herman Conerus, brother of John Conerus, traveled from Germany to Fairbury, to visit his brother. He was also a cigar maker. After visiting his brother, he left for Fairbury, Nebraska. Herman Conerus set up a cigar making operation in Fairbury, Nebraska.

The Blade noted in 1884 that John Conerus's cigars were becoming more popular. The Blade observed, "The fine brands of cigars made by John Conerus of this city, are gradually being sold over a wide territory, and where once sold they are always in great demand. When a Fairburian goes away, he takes a supply of these cigars, as they cannot be duplicated elsewhere for any money."

In 1885, John Conerus shipped 2,000 cigars to a dealer in Wyoming, who preferred the Conerus's No. 5 to any other brand.

John Conerus was very active in Fairbury politics and social groups. He was a member of the I. O. O. F. and the Masons. He also ran for political office in Fairbury. Apparently, Mr. Conerus used his Fairbury cigar making operation to his advantage during his political campaigning. The 1885 Blade reported, "As the sun approaches nearer and nearer the vernal equinox and smiles serenely upon mankind, so does the local candidate for office seek out the voter and thaws the winter's chill and reserve out of him by a vigorous handshaking and one of Conerus's best." The second wife of John Conerus, Carrie, was very active in the Illinois Eastern Star organization.

In 1892, the daughter of John Conerus, Marie Antoinette, married William Joseph O'Malley. He was the son of Fairbury saloon owner James O'Malley.

The first wife of John Conerus died in 1894. In 1897, John married a forty-seven-year-old woman from Germany. Her name was Carrie

Wollenweaver. In 1908, they built a new house on Elm Street in Fairbury. The cost of this new house was \$4,000. This is equivalent to \$113,000 in today's dollars.

On May 31, 1899, the great Johnstown Flood occurred. A huge earthen dam broke, and the resultant flood killed 2,209 people. The citizens of Fairbury took up a collection to help the victims. Fairbury raised \$527, with John Conerus donating \$1 of the total amount raised.

In the 1900 Blade, John Conerus ran an entertaining advertisement for his cigars. The ad was structured to be a conversation between Mrs. Newlywed and Mrs. Oldywed. Mrs. Newlywed asked Mrs. Oldywed what she was going to give her husband on his birthday. Mrs. Oldywed told her that she was giving her husband 100 cigars. Mrs. Newlywed asked how much this box of cigars would cost. Mrs. Oldywed replied they would cost nothing. Mrs. Oldywed said her husband smoked Conerus Fumers and he bought them by the box of 100 cigars. Each time he bought a new ox, Mrs. Oldywed took out two or three of them. When his birthday rolled around, Mrs. Oldywed gave her husband a box of 100 cigars. Her husband is pleased because he believes they are great cigars.

Other ads in the 1900 Blade noted that Conerus cigars were ten cent cigars that sold for only five cents. Daughter Frances Augusta was a Fairbury school teacher.

In 1908, tragedy struck the John Conerus family. His oldest son, William Christian Conerus, died at age 35. William was born in Aurora and moved to Fairbury when he was five years old. He grew up in Fairbury and worked in his father's cigar factory. In 1903, William moved to Fairbury, Nebraska, and set up his own cigar making operation. He died while living in Fairbury, Nebraska, and it was his wish to be buried there.

In 1918, son Paul Conerus closed the Fairbury cigar factory. 1919, James Moran moved his cigar factory from the Weber building to the Claudon building formerly occupied by Paul Conerus.

John Conerus passed away in August of 1920 at age 76. He was buried in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery. His second wife lived until 1929. She died at age 79 and is also buried in Graceland Cemetery.

John Conerus and his two brothers left their cigar making mark on the Illinois cities of Fairbury and Aurora, as well as Fairbury, Nebraska.







John Conerus



## CHAPTER 29

### **The Dangers of Coal Mining**

#### **Being a Fairbury Coal Miner Was a Dangerous Occupation**

John Marsh and his son Henry Marsh discovered coal one mile west of Fairbury in 1862. Their discovery of coal 200 feet below the prairie set off a coal mining boom in Illinois. Within a few years, Fairbury had five different coal mines operating. People flocked to Fairbury to work as coal miners. They came from the Eastern United States and Europe to Fairbury. The Fairbury coal mines operated from 1862 until the last mine closed in 1941.

It is unclear exactly how many total tons of coal were mined from beneath Fairbury. The Fairbury Echoes Museum has a sign which indicates that around three millions tons of coal were mined. Unfortunately, there is no data source for this estimate.

The Illinois State Geological Survey 2012 report reports there was a total of 1.742 million tons of coal mined from Fairbury. Unfortunately, the ISGS only had production data from three of the five Fairbury coal mines.

If the ratio of 1.742 million tons of coal for three mines is applied to five mines, the total coal production from Fairbury would be 2.9 million tons. This is very close to the 3.0 million number posted in the Fairbury Echoes Museum. So, a fair assumption is that about 3.0 million tons of coal were mined from Fairbury between 1862 and 1941.

In the building construction industry, they developed a rule-of-thumb for worker safety. In the 1930s, major building projects experienced one fatality for each \$1 million of project expenditure. This ratio applied to big projects like the Boulder Dam, skyscrapers in New York City, and the Golden Gate Bridge.

The Spring 1994 edition of the SIU magazine titled ***Concerning Coal: Tidbits About Coal for Public Consumption***, has an article that has some data on the safety rule-of-thumb used in the coal mining industry. From 1883 until 1917, the rule-of-thumb was one death per every 90,000 tons of

coal mined. After 1917, there were some improvements implemented in coal mining. These improvements resulted in a safer rule-of-thumb of one fatality per every 380,000 tons of coal mined.

If the safer rule-of-thumb is applied to the three million tons of coal mined in Fairbury, we should expect to have experienced about eight fatalities in Fairbury coal mines.

In a typical Fairbury coal mine, the main shaft was excavated down to the coal vein located 180 to 200 feet below ground. In this main shaft, two elevator cars operated under steam power. While one car went up, the other car came down.

The coal veins in Fairbury were only about five feet high. The mines used a room and pillar method of mining. Miners drilled holes in the coal vein. Explosives were inserted into the drilled holes and fired to loosen the coal in the vein. The miners propped up the ceiling using wooden posts. They moved the coal chunks into little railroad cars pulled by mules. They left coal pillars to keep the roof from collapsing.

The mules pulled the railroad cars to the steam-powered elevators. The elevators transported the coal up to the surface. On the surface, the coal was ground into smaller pieces, and then sold to retail customers.

A fundamental safety review of this type of mine reveals several high-risk areas. Large chunks of coal or rock falling unexpectedly and crushing the miner was the highest risk. Six Fairbury coal miners perished because of coal or rocks falling on them.

The second highest risk was blasting related accidents. Blasts occurring at the wrong time could severely injure the coal miner. Two Fairbury coal miners perished because of blasting related accidents.

Another risk was the small train car derailing and knocking out a wooden roof support pole. Once the pole was moved, the roof collapsed, and the miner was crushed by falling rock. One Fairbury coal miner perished because of a train car derailment.

Another risk was moving elevator cars. One miner perished when he was crushed by a descending elevator car.

Records indicate at least ten coal miners perished in the Fairbury coal mines. This is slightly more than expected using the industry safety averages. There were also many near-miss accidents which injured miners. Coal mining was probably the most dangerous occupation in Fairbury while the coal mines were in operation.



Fairbury Coal Miners at the Walton Coal Mine

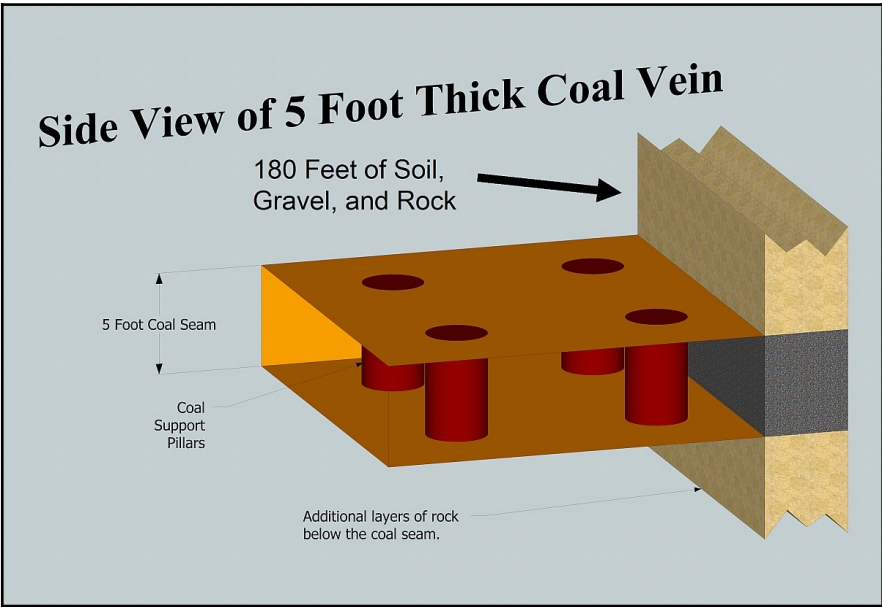


Illustration of a Fairbury Coal Mine

## **CHAPTER 30**

### **Fairbury Movie Star**

#### **Fairbury Actress Was Early Silent Film Movie Star**

The parents of Hazel Ona Keener were Lemuel M. Keener (1875-1941) and Lillian Reed (1870-1943). Hazel O. Keener was born in Fairbury on October 22, 1904. Mr. Keener was a farmer who moved his family quite often.

The September 1905 Blade recounted that Mr. and Mrs. Keener and daughter, of Fairbury, were the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Green, Sunday, in McDowell.

By the 1910 U.S. Census, Hazel and her parents had moved to Wythe Township in Hancock County, Illinois. This location is just east of Keokuk, Iowa.

Hazel attended schools in the Quad Cities area. By the 1920 U.S. Census, Hazel and her parents were living in Anderson, Missouri. This is south of Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

In 1921, the Chicago Tribune newspaper held a beauty contest to determine the most beautiful girl in the Central West. Three judges selected the most beautiful girls from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Chicago. Each Sunday, the newspaper would announce the winner of one of the five states plus Chicago. Each of the six girls won \$1,000. This would be equivalent to \$14,200 in today's dollars. The overall winner received \$10,000. The grand prize would be equal to \$142,000 in today's dollars.

In the May 15, 1921 edition, Hazel O. Keener was announced as the prettiest girl in Iowa. The Tribune article recounted that Hazel lived in Bettendorf, Iowa, with her father, mother, and a brother. They lived in a small bungalow, and her father worked as a mechanic in one of the car shops.

The three judges awarded the honors to Miss Keener for her aristocratic bearing, regal statuesque, distinguished air, and a perfectly modeled face. "If there is such a thing as aristocracy in our democratic country, she has it," they commented. Hazel Keener was just sixteen years old when she won this award.

The Tribune reporter asked Hazel what she was going to do with the \$1,000 prize money. Hazel replied, "Daddy's health has not been good, and he wants to get out of the shops on to a farm so I would like to buy that for him. And then I want to buy mother a lot of nice clothes, and then I would like to get myself a really nice tailored suit, shoes with short vamps and low heels, and a beautiful hat: and then I would like to help my brother to go back and finish his university work."

The reporter noted that Miss Keener's ambition was to go on stage. She was five feet, six inches tall, and weighed 125 pounds. Her mother was from Virginia, and her father from Tennessee. Hazel's beautifully modulated voice and a charming enunciation indicated her southern parentage. Her hair was brown, wavy, and quite bountiful. Her eyes were hazel and most expressive. Her skin was creamy, and her features classic. She had the poise and grace of one that was years older. She would rather act than cook or play basketball or go to dances.

Her mother reported that Hazel was a great little mother's helper. Her mother also stated that Hazel was the youngest to graduate in her class. Hazel did not win the overall grand prize in the Chicago Tribune contest. Flora Mae Hackett of Indiana was declared the overall winner.

After the beauty contest ended, Hazel and her mother headed to Hollywood. In December of 1921, Hazel landed her first movie job in the film *Penrod* by Booth Tarkington. She was a supporting actress in that film.

In 1922, Hazel married actor Francis Hubert Smith. This marriage ended in 1923 because of annulment or divorce. In 1924, the United States Western Association of Motion Picture Advertisers started a promotional campaign called the WAMPAS Baby Stars. Each year, this campaign honored 13 to 15 young actresses they believed to be on the threshold of



movie stardom. In 1924, Hazel Keener was selected as one of the WAMPAS Baby Stars.

In early 1924, the Monogram Pictures Corporation released six new western pictures. Fred Thomson was the lead actor in all of these films. Hazel Keener was a supporting actress in these films. This film company also had 10 million copies of Hazel's photo printed to use as promotional material for these six films.

Later in 1924, Hazel landed her first lead role in a Fred Thompson western film titled *The Dangerous Coward*. Film critics thought Hazel did an excellent job of developing her ability to become a lead actress.

In 1925, Hazel was a supporting actress in the silent film *The Freshman*. Hazel became close friends with the female lead actress in this film, Jobyna Ralston. Incredibly, this almost 100-year-old film is still available for viewing on YouTube. This film is likely the most critically acclaimed film that Hazel appeared in.

Also in 1925, Hazel did a lengthy interview with a Chicago Tribune reporter. The reporter was interested in how difficult it was for her to become a movie star after winning the big beauty contest. Hazel explained that it was not easy to succeed as an actress. Her mother and her only had a few dollars left of the \$1,000 prize when they arrived in Hollywood. She usually had to pay for her own clothing for her acting jobs. To make ends meet, she often took photography jobs or modeling jobs in between acting assignments. She was often turned down for acting jobs because her good looks would detract moviegoers from watching the lead actors in a film.

Hazel kept working at it and finally achieved financial success in the film *The Freshman*. This film's success helped her to land subsequent acting jobs. She took the advice of veteran actresses and established an emergency fund to pay her expenses between films.

In 1931, at age 26, Hazel married a salesman from Grand Rapids, Michigan. His name was Ross Wilson Chatelain. They had no children. Hazel continued to appear in various films as a supporting actress. In 1941, she had a role in the film *Murder by Invitation*. This film is also viewable on YouTube.

In the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s, Miss Keener had small parts in approximately twenty movies. She acted in television with roles in episodes of Judge Roy Bean (1956) and Hopalong Cassidy (1954). In the latter stages of her life, Hazel became a minister in California. She passed away at age 74 in Ventura, California.



## **CHAPTER 31**

### **Levi Judson Odell**

#### **Fairbury Inventor Levi Judson Odell**

Levi Judson Odell was born in New York in 1855. He was the son of James H. Odell and Mary Straight. When Levi was seven years old, the family moved to Fairbury. His father farmed and taught school in Fairbury.

In 1875, the Pantagraph reported that Levi Odell had invented a new check-row corn planter attachment and it would be manufactured in Fairbury.

Levi married Naomi McKay in Decatur, Illinois, in 1878 when he was 23 years old. Naomi's parents lived in the Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, area. Their first child, daughter Grace Vennette was born on August 11, 1880, in Decatur, Illinois.

By 1883, Levi and his family moved back to Fairbury. His second daughter Carrie Madelyn Odell was born on October 9, 1883, in Fairbury, Illinois. In 1883, Levi also received his first U.S. Patent number 289,696 for a corn check-row planter. Two-fifths of the patent was assigned to his business partners. His partners were John Wesley Walton, Isaac Walton, and Henry Kingman.

To use a check row corn planter, the farmer would lay down a rope or steel cable with knots about every 30 inches. The farmer would then run the horse-drawn planter down the field, with the knotted rope running through the planter. Each knot in the line would trip a mechanism on the planter, which then planted a corn seed. At the end of the row, the farmer had to pull the stakes and move the rope over one increment.

An 1884 Blade article reported that Odell's check-rower factory was operating at full capacity. His factory employed 30 men and produced 250 machines a week.

On October 14, 1884, the first of the great Walton Brother's fires occurred. It started in Walton's grain mill. The grain mill was located on the south side of Locust Street, near the intersection with First Street. The massive fire jumped south across the railroad tracks and burned the Odell check rower factory to the ground. Levi Odell had no insurance and experienced a loss of \$3,000. That is equivalent to \$85,000 in today's dollars.

Many of the businesses destroyed in the 1884 fire had no insurance. Fairbury had so many fires in that era the insurance rate was very high at five-percent of the building value. Today, the cost of fire insurance is a fraction of one percent of the building value.

In 1885, Levi received his second U.S. patent for a check rower attachment for corn planters.

By 1890, Levi and his family moved to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. He decided to switch from making farm implements to manufacturing typewriters. Levi received his first of three patents related to his typewriter design. He received his second typewriter patent in 1891.

In the 1890s, there was a mad scramble to invent a typewriter that businesses and the general public could afford. It took until about 1910 for the industry to standardize on the mechanical typewriter many of us used. This design has a set of keys which you depress, and a linkage strikes the key onto the paper.

Levi Odell invented a simple and low-cost alternative to the design which eventually won out. His little machine was referred to as a linear index typewriter. It employed a rail that slides along the index. To use it, one would move the indicator until it reaches the desired character along the index. Then you pivot the finger-plate for an uppercase letter if needed. Then you just press on the lever next to the carriage. The type rail will then lower and type the character while a spring-loaded mechanism advances the carriage. The type rail will once again return to its rest position. A roller under the type rail applied ink to each of the typewriter's 78 characters as they passed over it. Supposedly, one could type up to 60 words per minute with an Odell typewriter.

The first Odell typewriters were manufactured in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Production was then moved to Chicago. About 30,000 Odell typewriters were produced between 1889 and 1904. They sold for \$20. This would be equivalent to \$564 in today's dollars. Odell typewriters can still be purchased on eBay for between \$500 and \$1,000. The Fairbury Echoes Museum has one of Odell's typewriters on display.

By 1909, Levi had moved to Chicago, Illinois. He received his third typewriter patent that year.

By 1911, he had moved again to Glendora, California. This time, he decided to switch from manufacturing typewriters to women's razors. He received two safety razor patents that year. He received a total of seven patents related to razors and their sharpening machines. He was granted two additional patents in 1913, two in 1914, and the last patent was issued in 1916. He set up a razor production factory in Glendora. The Fairbury Echoes Museum has one of Odell's razors on display.

In early 1911, at age 56, Levi was involved in an incident that made national news. Several newspapers carried the following story. "The notion that there is no chance for a working girl is dispelled by the story of Miss Lulu Branstetter of Kansas City, who answered a newspaper advertisement for a demonstrator in a Los Angeles manufacturing concern and was told by the president of the company, Levi Judson Odell, that her hands were too soft to work. Now she is Mrs. Levi Judson Odell."

A genealogical search found a California marriage record indicating Levi and Lulu were married on December 30, 1910. Levi Judson Odell died on June 10, 1919, in Los Angeles, California. He was 64 years old and is buried in Glendora.

Levi Judson Odell was a very talented inventor. He was granted a total of twelve U.S. patents. Levi was able to convert his creative talents into a lifelong career of manufacturing corn planters, typewriters, and razors.



Odell Typewriter

## **CHAPTER 32**

### **Old City Hall**

#### **Historic Old City Hall**

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to Indiana. In the 1860 U.S. Census, the population of Fairbury was only 269 residents.

John and Henry Marsh dug almost 200 feet down and discovered coal about one mile west of Fairbury in 1862. This discovery of coal prompted the opening of four more coal mines in Fairbury. Coal miners came to Fairbury from the eastern United States and Europe.

Farming the swampy ground around Fairbury was very difficult until the discovery of clay field drainage tile. In the 1880s, most of the land around Fairbury was drained by installing clay drainage tile. The demand for clay tile was so high that James W. McDowell and Rufus Strait opened their own clay tile factories on their farms.

Most of the houses and buildings in early Fairbury were constructed of wood. These wooden buildings burned easily and fires quickly spread from one building to another. A feud between the East and West sides of Fairbury generated many big fires. Most business owners did not buy fire insurance because the annual premium was five percent of the building value. In contrast, today's fire insurance annual premiums are a fraction of one percent of the building value. A Fairbury city fire department was organized in 1874.

The booming coal mines plus the productivity of the tiled farmland created a population boom in Fairbury. The population rose to 1,493 in 1870 and by 1880 was 2,140 residents. By 1890, the population was 2,324. The growing town needed a place to conduct public meetings and conduct city administrative business.

In 1888, the city fathers selected the southeast corner of Locust and Third Streets as the location for the city hall. Because the TP&W Railroad

owned the land at this location, negotiations were begun between the city and the railroad. The TP&W agreed to lease the property to the city, and the city would own the building. This lease with the railroad continues today.

The city fathers had several different goals they wanted to accomplish with the design of the new city hall. One of the main goals was to construct it from brick versus wood, so it could stand up to the many Fairbury fires. A second goal was to provide a home for the Fairbury fire department and to provide a fire bell that would alert the whole town if a fire broke out. The east side of the first story was designated as the room for the fire department and their apparatus. The fire bell tower was on the southwest corner of the building. The new city hall would not have any other buildings adjoining it, to reduce the chance of fire spreading into the city hall. A simple one-faced clock displayed the time.

Administrative services would be housed in the first story. The city clerk maintained the city laws and records on the first floor. The city jail would be housed in the southwest corner of the first story. Space would be provided for three jail cells. The first-floor jail cells were the responsibility of the Constable. A Justice of the Peace held court in both the first and second floors. These three jail cells still exist today.

Another goal was for a large public meeting room. The south half of the building on the second story was designed to be the public meeting room. A seven-foot wide stairway allowed the public to enter the building from Third Street and walk up to the second story large meeting room. City Council meetings were also initially held in this large room.

Wiggoner Brownson was hired by the city to complete the carpentry work, cornice, and roof. Joseph Stickoffer did the stone and brick masonry work. The building was twenty-nine feet wide by sixty feet long. Construction of the building was finished in 1892.

In 1912, local businessmen Isaac and J.W. Walton donated the funds to purchase a new clock tower with a four-sided clock. The mechanical works for the clock are located on the second story of the building. A cable connects the works on the second floor to the clock faces in the tower. An



iconic photograph shows a large crowd was present when the new clock tower was dedicated.

The fire department maintained its headquarters in the eastern half of the first floor until the early 1930s when a new fire station was built. The local volunteer firemen were summoned by the fire bell located at the rear of the building for all fire calls. The fire department also used the bell tower to hang and dry its fire hose.

In 1996, Jack Tollensdorf spent many hours researching all the information required for the forty-two-page application to have this building placed on the National Registry of Historic Places. This included over sixty hours of transcribing old City Council meeting minutes written in longhand. In that era, there were no computer archives for the Blade and Pantagraph newspapers. The building was successfully added to the National Registry of Historic Places in 1996.

The four-sided 1912 Seth Thomas clock was restored in the 1950s by Wallace Jaka, grandson of the clock's original maker. Accumulated dirt and the effects of wear and weather caught up to the clock again, however, and it was stopped in 2003 because it failed to keep accurate time. Various community groups participated in a fund-raising drive to obtain the \$10,000 needed to repair the clock. The mechanism was cleaned and repaired, the wooden hands were replaced with aluminum ones, and the four faces were given new glass covers. The clock was back in service in time for the 2003 Christmas Parade.

In 1997, a new City Hall was dedicated at 201 West Locust Street. All city offices were moved to the new building. Today, the old City Hall building is used by three different community groups. The Chamber of Commerce and the Red Cross utilize the first floor. The large meeting room on the second floor is used by the Boy Scouts.





Clock Mechanism on 2nd Story of Old City Hall



## **CHAPTER 33**

### **Mapel Brothers**

#### **Early Fairbury Harness Makers**

The Thomas Mapel family moved from West Virginia to Potosi Corners, south of Fairbury. In 1869, the family with four children moved to Fairbury. Sons John and Nimrod started farming together in the Fairbury area.

John Mapel married Elizabeth Syphers. Nimrod Mapel married Margaret Moran. In 1880, the two brothers invested \$350 in a harness business. Unfortunately, their new business burned down just two weeks after they started it. They resumed their harness business, but in 1884, their business burned a second time. In 1890, they decided to build their own spacious brick building on the north side of Locust Street, between Second and Third Streets. Today, this building is occupied by the Once 'n Again business.

The new spacious building allowed the Mapel brothers to expand into hardware, implements, wagons, and buggies. Their core business was a top-notch, hand-made harness department.

Buggies were ordered by the carload, and the upstairs was full of an excellent variety for purchase. In 1906, W. J. Bethard purchased the first automobile in Fairbury, and the writing was on the wall for the decline of the horse buggy, but the Mapel Brothers business success continued. For example, in 1929, they sold 18,000 pairs of gloves. Horses continued to be used on Fairbury area farms into the 1940s. Today, there are still several old wood wagons with the name Mapel Bros. stenciled on the side of the wagons.

The Mapel Brothers Harness Shop building was a popular place for retired farmers to gather and socialize. In the cold winter months, the retired farmers would gather around a pot-bellied stove inside the building. When the weather got warm, they would set in chairs outside the building. An

old photograph circa 1900 shows fifteen of the harness shop "Council" setting in chairs outside the building.

John Mapel died in 1923 at the age of 73. He was buried in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery. At this point, the Mapel brothers had been in business together for 43 years. Nimrod decided to continue their business with his daughter Frances Lindsay as their bookkeeper.

Nimrod's health began to fail in 1932, so daughter Frances Lindsay took over the business. In 1935, Nimrod died at the age of 78. He was interred in the mausoleum at Graceland Cemetery.

After Nimrod died, a duckpin bowling alley was opened in the Mapel building. It was managed by James B. Packard of Charleston. He was part of a business group that operated a chain of twenty-two bowling alleys in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. In duckpin bowling, the pins are shorter and fatter than regular bowling pins. The balls are also smaller without any finger holes. This bowling alley only lasted five months, before it was removed and installed in Rantoul.

Frances Lindsay continued the harness business until her own husband Edward died in 1950. At that time, the Mapel Brothers' harness business was one of the last establishments in the country where hand-made harnesses were still made.

In 1950, Frances Lindsay sold the Mapel Brothers building to Joe Zimmerman, who opened a hardware store which operated for many decades.

Besides a few old Mapel Bros. wagons in the area, the only other reminder of this iconic harness business is the horse mannequin. The Mapel brothers bought this full-size horse mannequin in 1890 to display their custom harnesses. For six decades, it proudly stood in their storefront window on Locust Street. When the business finally closed in 1950, Frances Lindsay saved the mannequin and stored it. For the next half-century, various Fairbury area people stored it and refurbished it.

The Pontiac car company actually got its start making horse-drawn buggies. The Pontiac Oakland Museum in Pontiac, Illinois, had a circa



1890 Pontiac horse-drawn buggy in its collection. The 1890 Mapel Brothers horse mannequin was donated to this museum, and the horse and buggy are on display today. If you get a chance, stop in at this museum and see this proud reminder of the Mapel brothers sixty years of business in Fairbury.



Horse of Mapel Brothers at Pontiac Oakland Museum in Pontiac, Illinois





## **CHAPTER 34**

### **The Mapel Brother's Horse**

#### **The Storage and Restoration of the Mapel Brothers Horse Mannequin**

In 1880, brothers John and Nimrod Mapel invested \$350 in a harness business. Unfortunately, their new business burned down just two weeks after they started it. They resumed their harness business, but in 1884, their business burned a second time. In 1890, they decided to build a spacious brick building on the north side of Locust Street, between Second and Third Streets. Today, this building is occupied by the Once 'n Again business.

In 1890, the Mapel brothers bought a life-size mannequin of a horse. They purchased this mannequin to display their hand-made harness equipment in their store. John Mapel died in 1923 at the age of seventy-three. Nimrod Mapel decided to continue the business with his daughter Frances Lindsay as their bookkeeper.

Nimrod's health began to fail in 1932, so daughter Frances Lindsay took over the business. In 1935, Nimrod died at the age of 78. Frances Lindsay continued the harness business until her husband Edward died in 1950. At that time, the Mapel Brothers' harness business was one of the last establishments in the country where hand-made harnesses were still made.

In 1950, Frances Lindsay sold the Mapel Brothers building to Joe Zimmerman, who opened a hardware store which operated for many decades. The horse mannequin had been on display for sixty years on Locust Street. A few Fairbury citizens fondly remember sitting on the horse when they were children.

After the building was sold, Frances Lindsay had the horse mannequin moved to her garage. She accidentally hit the horse mannequin with her automobile, breaking the cast iron legs.

Fairbury attorney, Henry Phillips asked Fay Kyburz if she could repair the damaged mannequin. Her husband, Virgil Kyburz, moved the horse

mannequin to their garage in their home. Virgil hung the horse from the garage ceiling with ropes so his wife could attempt the repairs. She tried to repair the horse using a Georgia Pacific plaster compound. Unfortunately, this plaster would not adhere properly to the old horse.

The Kyburz's then moved from Fairbury to Arizona. At that point, John Bellot and his sons used a horse trailer to move the horse mannequin to the basement of his drug store. It remained in storage in the basement for several years.

In 1992, the damaged horse mannequin was then moved from the drug store basement to the rural home of Howard Fugate. Upon disassembly of the damaged horse mannequin, it was found it had cast iron legs, a wooden body, and a cast-iron mouth. This structure was covered by paper mache. Actual hair was used for the horse's mane and tail.

The first step in the restoration was to build a wooden frame and base to support the hefty pieces of the horse. The cast iron legs were broken into six parts. Richard Walter repaired the cast iron legs by welding the pieces together.

The horse's "hide" was repaired with paper mache and automotive body filler. These materials were then sanded, buffed, and painted. The next critical step in the restoration process was the paint. John Tollensdorf Sr., local paint store owner, advised the use of an alkyd paint with an oil base. This paint gave a flat looking finish so the horse mannequin would appear as it did in 1890 when it was new.

The original horse mannequin had gray dapple dots. Howard Fugate first traced a pattern indicating where the original dapples were located on the mannequin. After the main body was repainted, Howard painted the dapple dots in precisely the same location as the original mannequin. The colors used for the dapples were peppercorn gray with pussy-willow gray spots.

After painting, local taxidermist Dean Wessels carefully placed and focused the horse's eyes. The last step in the restoration was to replace the original horsehair tail, mane, and forelock. It took Howard Fugate about two years to restore the damaged horse mannequin.

After the horse mannequin was restored, Howard Fugate carefully stored it for many years. He even named the mannequin "Old Jim" after one of the previous horses he had owned. Old Jim made an appearance at the Fairbury Fair. Many fair attendees were delighted to see the horse they remembered when they were children. They told stories to their children and grandchildren about their memories of the old horse.

Howard Fugate died in 2003. His widow asked the Fairbury Echoes Museum to take possession of the horse mannequin. Because of its large size, the Echoes Museum had no place to store or display the horse. The Echoes Museum asked Spence Farms if they would store and display the horse. Spence Farms agreed to store the old horse.

In 2004, the Echoes Museum moved from the house east of the Dominy Library to a new location at 126 West Locust Street. As part of the grand opening of the new museum facility, the old horse was displayed a few days behind the new museum location.

During Fairbury's 2007 Sesquicentennial Celebration, Old Jim made another trip to town and was put on display at its original location in the front window of It's Once N' Again.

In 2011, the Pontiac Oakland Museum opened in Pontiac, Illinois. The Pontiac car company got its start making horse-drawn buggies. The Pontiac Oakland Museum in Pontiac, Illinois, had a circa 1890 Pontiac horse-drawn buggy in its collection. Using the 1890 Mapel brothers horse to pull the horse-drawn carriage seemed to be an ideal long-term solution to properly display the old horse. Because of many people's efforts over a sixty-year period, an essential part of Fairbury's history was preserved. If you get a chance, stop in at this museum and see this proud reminder of the Mapel brothers sixty years of business in Fairbury.



Mapel Brother's Horse Mannequin Under Repair

## **CHAPTER 35**

### **Native American Artifacts**

#### **Fairbury's Rich History of Discovering Native American Artifacts**

About 10,000 years ago, the Fairbury area was covered with Ice Age glaciers up to one mile thick. So much water was tied up in the formation of these vast glaciers that the ocean sea level dropped. The lowered sea level exposed a land bridge between Asia and Alaska. The first humans to come to North America walked across this land bridge into what is now Alaska. When the glaciers melted, these early humans continued to move south until they occupied the Fairbury area.

If people have been in the Fairbury area for about 8,000 years, this means over 266 generations of people have lived in our area. Archeologists divide these 8,000 years into five different cultures. These five groups include the Paleo Indian, Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian, and Late Prehistoric cultures. These different groups lived differently and used different kinds of weapons and tools. Experts in this field can date artifacts into one of these five different cultural periods.

Fairbury area citizens have been finding artifacts in the farm fields since Major Valentine Darnall, the first pioneer, arrived south of Fairbury in 1829. A review of the historical Blade newspaper archives since 1871 revealed the peak of published accounts of discovering Native American artifacts occurred in the 1940s.

In 1941, a Pantagraph newspaper story recounted the formation of the Fairbury Archaeological Society. This group of Fairbury men held a meeting every two weeks. They studied Indian lore in the cold winter months and took field trips in the warmer months. This group sponsored and conducted seven special meetings which were attended by artifact collectors from all over Central Illinois.

Benjamin Nussbaum was President of the Fairbury Archaeological Society. Vice-President was Burbon Downing. Edgar Zook was Secretary,

and Wade Simmons was Treasurer. The group had a total of ten members. Marion Knott was one of the club members.

The 1941 Pantagraph article also noted that Livingston County was one of the leading counties in the state of Illinois for Indian lore. Eminent students of early history stated that two main Indian trails crossed just south of Fairbury. Only seven counties in Illinois had two principal Indian trails running through them.

This same Pantagraph article also recounted the Grand Kickapoo village, the largest community of the entire tribe in Illinois, was located about three and a half miles south of Fairbury. Local Fairbury archaeologist found that frequent visits to this site rewarded them with many treasures from the earlier civilizations.

The Kickapoo village was located south of Fairbury from about 1828 to 1830. The village moved about ten miles straight east to Oliver's Grove in 1830. They stayed at that site south of Chatsworth until they were forced to leave the state in 1832. They moved to Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico. The web site of the Kickapoo in Oklahoma has more historical information on their tribe.

May of 1948 proved to be the most exciting discovery ever made by the Fairbury Archaeological Society. Six miles north of Fairbury, where Indian Creek empties into the Vermilion River, a burned-out structure was being excavated for a new house. When some artifacts were found, digging was stopped. P. C. James, the land-owner, gave permission to the Fairbury Archaeological Society to carefully excavate the site.

Edgar Zook, Marion Knott, Guy Slater, Clinton Harris, Willis Harris, Jr., and Don Merrill of Fairbury participated in this archaeological dig. Ed Antanitus of Oglesby also attended. Club president Ben Nussbaum was unable to be present. This group carefully used trowels, whisk brooms, and spatulas to excavate the site. They also took measurements and photographs of the project.

They found a human skeleton, on its left side with the knees flexed and facing the southwest. The skeleton was in an excellent state of preservation. Evidence indicated the person had suffered a violent death. A

two-inch gash, which could have been made by a blunt-edged weapon, was on the right side of the skull. The lower jaw bone was also broken.

Other artifacts at the site indicated the burial dated back to the Woodland culture. This culture existed between 500 A.D. and 1,500 A.D. On the right arm of the skeleton was a crude, leaf-shaped arrow of quartzite and the middle part of a flat drill. Beneath the skeleton was a five-inch split-bone awl. The awl was very sharp and highly polished from much use.

All of the measurements and photographs of the site were sent to Dr. John C. McGregor, Chief Archaeologist at the Illinois State Museum in Springfield. The skull was sent to Bartlett Frost, Dioramist, at the Illinois State Museum. Mr. Frost had developed a method of reconstructing faces using skulls recovered from archaeological sites. These reconstructions present a very accurate likeness of the original subject.

In the 1980s, the Illinois State Museum in Springfield opened their Peoples of the Past exhibit. This exhibit includes five diorama scenes of Native Americans in Illinois. These dioramas are full-scale size and give a very accurate view of the daily lives of these peoples. It is possible that information gathered from the Fairbury 1948 excavation was used to help construct these wonderful exhibits that help bring to life Illinois' rich Native American heritage.

Since more than 266 generations of Native Americans lived in our area and left some of their artifacts, many more artifacts will likely continue to be discovered in the future.



Kickapoo Scene from Illinois State Museum in Springfield



## **CHAPTER 36**

### **Fairbury's Most Famous Drug Store**

#### **Early Fairbury Ice Cream Parlor Sponsored Men's Basketball Team**

William Jacob Braun was born in 1876 in Jacksonville, Illinois. His parents were Jacob P. Braun and Ann Elizabeth Long. When William was six years old, his family moved from Jacksonville to Fairbury. He attended the Fairbury city schools. After finishing his schooling, he worked at Wade's drug store.

Rufus Cullen Huntoon was born in 1880 in Pontiac, Illinois. His parents were Rufus Cullen Huntoon Sr. and Margaret Phelps. When Rufus was eight years old, his family moved to Fairbury. Rufus attended the Fairbury city schools. His parents noticed that Rufus was a natural musician. He taught himself the piano and played it at social events. Rufus soon had the nickname of Cully Huntoon.

In 1908, William was thirty-two years old, and Rufus was twenty-eight years old. They decided to go into business together. They opened the Bon Ton confectionery and soft drink parlor on June 5, 1908. Their building was at 108 East Locust. This building was later the Fairbury Paint Store for many years.

The new business ran an ad in the Blade newspaper in the September 9, 1909 edition. The advertisement noted the Bon Ton Ice Cream Parlor was the coolest and finest place in the city. The ad also stated the Bon Ton had soft drinks, crushed fruit, sundaes, sodas, fine candies, and good cigars.

In 1912, at the age of thirty-two, Rufus married Kate Eatherly Sutton. She was born in Pennsylvania. They had one child in 1919, Hugh Sutton Huntoon.

The Bon Ton often sponsored musical entertainment for its customers. In 1913, John McGreal, a baritone soloist, sang at the Bon Ton for one week.

In 1914, at the age of thirty-eight, William Braun married Gertrude May Foster. Gertrude was born in Pontiac. They had three children. Son William F. Braun was born in 1915, daughter Sarah Ann Braun in 1918, and son Frank R. Braun in 1922. Unfortunately, William Braun's wife died at age forty in 1926.

The two business partners decided to sponsor a traveling men's basketball team. A group of Bon Ton customers decided to celebrate the formation of the new team by breaking out their cigars. The cigar they happened to choose to smoke was called The Limit. Therefore, the team was named the Bon Ton Limits. The first season for the Limits was the 1910-1911 season. They played their home games upstairs in the Opera House located at the northwest corner of Locust and Fifth Streets.

In March of 1911, the Pantagraph recounted the Bon Ton Limits finished their first season with a record of 11-1. The lineup for the Bon Ton Limits on their last game of that season was Lyle Jenkins and Perry Keck as forwards, Wes Hanson was the center, and Jack Fugate and Sam Wade were the guards.

The opponents of the Bon Ton Limits included the Champaign Blues, the Gibson City Yours Truly, the New York Nationals, the Peoria Tigers, the Piper City Moguls, the Wilmington Seals, and the Chicago West Side Browns. In 1914, the Limits played a traveling team of girls called the Boston Bloomers.

The basketball court in the upper story of the Opera House was relatively small. There was only one row of chairs for fan seating. The rest of the spectators had to stand during the whole game. The games were so popular that many Fairbury young men wanted to take their dates to the games. These young men would hire kids to get to the Opera House as soon as it was open, and secure seats on the chairs. When the young man and his date would arrive for the game, the kids would give up their seats to the courting couple. The kids thought this arrangement was great. The kids made some money and got to watch the exciting games. In 1914, over 300 people saw the Bon Ton Limits defeat the Champaign Blues.

In subsequent years, other players joined the team. John Joda played for the Bon Ton Limits. He was later killed in World War I in France. The

Fairbury American Legion post is named after John Joda. Carl Goudy also joined the team. Carl and his brother William became early motorcycle racers. Carl and his brother William were inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1998.

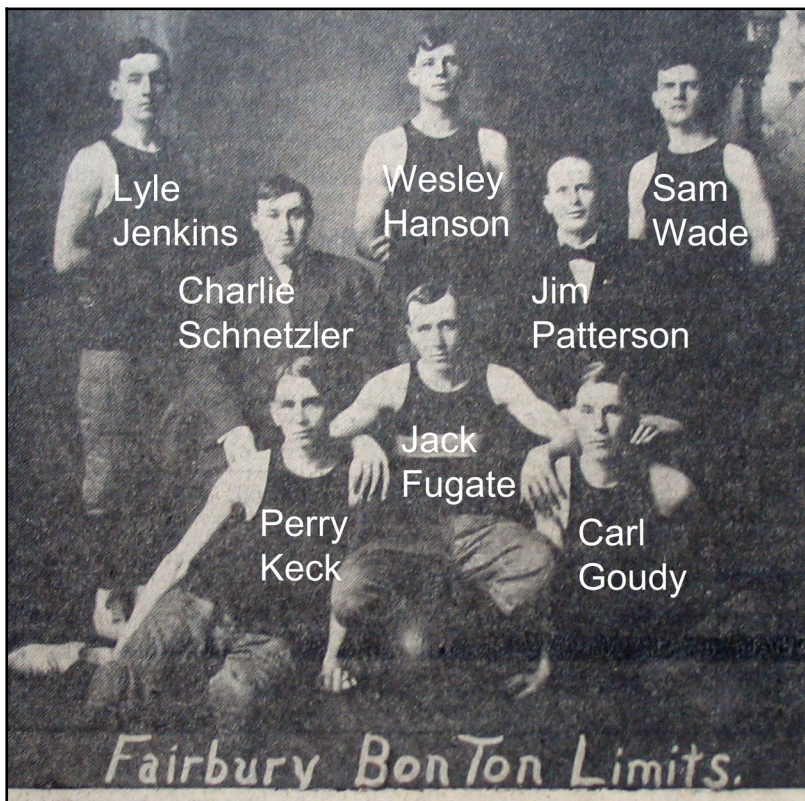
The basketball games were very physically rough with the players wearing large knee pads and elbow pads. As a game got heated, some players were forced into the coal chute opening or pushed down the stairs. Carl Goudy had the art of putting out his foot and gently nudging his opponent in the back and hurtling him to the floor down to perfection.

In one exciting game, the Limits were playing the Chicago West Side Browns. The score was close the entire game. Jack Fugate, the Limit's back guard, hardly ever took a shot at the basket. With just a few seconds left in the game, the Limit's were trailing the Browns by one point. The crowd was shouting for the Limits to take one last shot. Jack Fugate bent down with the ball between his legs and with an underhand sweep, let the ball fly the length of the court. Just before the end of the game gun sounded, Jack's shot went through the basket. The crowd went wild with jubilation.

Before the invention of modern refrigerators, the Bon Ton had to use ice to cool its ice cream and drinks. In 1925, the Bon Ton had their first iceless refrigerator installed, and it helped to keep their ice cream at the same temperature. The last mention of the Bon Ton Limits basketball team was the 1925 season. The team existed for about fourteen years.

In 1930, William Braun was fifty-four, and Cully Huntoon was fifty years of age. In August of 1930, they sold the Bon Ton business to Walt Somers. He continued to operate the Bon Ton until 1937 when he sold it to Mr. A. J. Porter. The Bon Ton had been open for twenty-nine years.

Cully Huntoon died at age sixty-two in 1942. William Braun died in 1945 at age sixty-nine. Their ice cream parlor and their basketball team provided refreshments and exciting entertainment to many Fairbury citizens.



Lyle  
Jenkins

Wesley  
Hanson

Sam  
Wade

Charlie  
Schnetzler

Jim  
Patterson

Jack  
Fugate

Perry  
Keck

Carl  
Goudy

*Fairbury Bon Ton Limits.*

## CHAPTER 37

### Shedd Aquarium

#### The Shedd Aquarium Connection to Fairbury

The Shedd family were originally a New Hampshire family. John Graves Shedd was the son of William Shedd (1801-1875) and Abigail Wallace (1810-1894). The family had two girls and seven boys.

The oldest son, William, moved to the Fairbury area by 1870. His farm was near Weston, Illinois. John G. Shedd decided not to be a farmer like his father. After becoming an adult, he worked in small retail shops in New Hampshire and Vermont.

Family lore recounts that John G. Shedd came to the Fairbury area to live with his older brother William. John G. Shedd got a job at Walton's department store. John had an idea on how to improve the merchandise displays in the huge windows in the store. The manager rejected John's plan, which made him angry. He left Fairbury and went to look for a job in Chicago. He found a job at Marshall Field's department store in Chicago in 1871.

No documentation can be found which supports the family lore story of John working at Walton's in Fairbury. However, there is documentation of John's innovative ideas in the 2010 book, *Marshall Field's: The Store That Helped Build Chicago*. This book recounts that Shedd noticed that at the end of each season, some sizes or colors remained unsold, whereas others sold through quite early. Buyers of the day simply bought according to the manufacturer's recommendations or based on personal hunches, with little regard to customer preferences. Shedd believed there was a better way. With permission from his boss, Henry Willing, Shedd carefully reviewed past sales ledgers and devised a formula to determine the sell-through, or "turns," of each item. Now buyers could stock up, for example, on specific sizes and buy fewer of others.

Field studied the proposal and believed it had merit. He instructed Willing to put the new system in place in the ladies neckwear and lace department

for a trial period. In that department, sales doubled within a year, and Shedd's new system became the basis for all purchasing at the store. John Shedd worked his way up to President of the company. He was named Chairman of the Board after he had worked 50 years for the store.

Sometime between 1870 and 1875, John G. Shedd's parents moved from New Hampshire to the Fairbury area. His father, William Shedd, died in 1875 and is buried in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery. His mother, Abigail Wallace Shedd, died in 1894. She was buried near her husband in Fairbury.

Another family lore story is that Shedd had a private railroad car. If Shedd wanted to visit his brother William's family, he would ride his private train car to Fairbury for the weekend. No documentation could be found to support this story.

Men of John Shedd's wealth often did have their private rail cars built. In the 1917 edition of *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, it was noted that John Shedd was on the Board of Directors for the B&O Railroad. He only got paid \$20 to attend the board meetings, but he could have his own private car pulled on the train at no charge. So it is very possible that John Shedd used his private rail car to visit his Fairbury relatives.

In 1922, John G. Shedd received a medal from Marshall Field's for his 50 years of service to that company. The Pantagraph published a story saying that John was a Fairbury boy, and his father had extensive land holdings in the Fairbury area. A review of the historical data shows the Pantagraph may have "stretched" this story somewhat. There is no evidence that his father owned land in the Fairbury area. His father also died in 1875. John's brother William Shedd did own farmland in the Weston area.

John G. Shedd died at age 76 in Chicago in 1926. Because he was such a well-known businessman and philanthropist, his death notice was published on the front page of the Chicago Tribune. His estate was worth \$15.2 million in 1926. This amount would be equivalent to \$219 million in today's dollars.

He left most of his money to his two daughters, but he bequeathed money to many other family members. He willed

\$10,000 to his niece, Dora Shedd Bennett, in Fairbury. This amount is about \$144,000 in today's dollars.

John G. Shedd also left \$3 million to build a new aquarium in Chicago. This amount would be equivalent to \$43 million in today's dollars. After his death, his widow proceeded to construct the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago. Groundbreaking took place on November 2, 1927. Construction was completed on December 19, 1929. The first exhibits were opened on May 30, 1930.

The Shedd Aquarium initially included 132 exhibit tanks. As one of the first inland aquariums in the world, the Shedd Aquarium had to rely on a custom-made railroad car, the Nautilus, for the transport of fish and seawater. The Nautilus remained in service until 1959.

In 1930, twenty railroad tank cars made eight round trips between Key West and Chicago to transport 1,000,000 US gallons of seawater for the Shedd's saltwater exhibits. In 1933, Chicago hosted its second world's fair, the Century of Progress. The Aquarium was located immediately north of the fairgrounds, and the museum gained exposure to a large international crowd.

There is a large complex of Shedd family gravestones at the Fairbury Graceland cemetery. You see them just after you enter the cemetery from the Seventh Street entrance. John G. Shedd's father, mother, and brother are all buried in the same location.



Shedd Aquarium in Chicago



## **CHAPTER 38**

### **Kuenzi Dairy**

#### **Two Generations Enjoyed Kuenzi Milk and Popcorn**

Johannes "John" Kuenzi was born in Frutigen, Berne County, Switzerland in 1864. He moved from Switzerland to Fairbury in 1880 when he was sixteen years of age. He purchased a farm one-half mile north of Locust Street. This farm was northwest of the Prairie Central High School.

He married Miss Caroline Meis in 1891. They had seven children. Son John Adam Kuenzi was born in 1895. Another son, Joseph "Joe" Nicholas Kuenzi was born in 1897. Caroline died in 1905.

John Kuenzi Sr. converted part of his farmland into six city blocks in 1893. This tract of land was north of Hickory Street and west of Fourth Street. This area is known as the Kuenzi Addition to Fairbury. The Kuenzi Dairy company was founded in 1895. John Kuenzi made daily deliveries of milk to houses in Fairbury. The milk was bottled in glass jars with the "Kuenzi Dairy" lettering on each bottle. A significant fire wiped out the barn and all of their milk cows. John Kuenzi Sr. built a new larger barn in 1916 and slowly renewed his herd. They typically milked forty cows on their farm.

In those early years, they also had a grape vineyard. John Kuenzi Sr. once sold a car of wine made on his Fairbury farm to a company in Peoria.

Around 1909, John Kuenzi Sr. decided to diversify further and add the production of popcorn to his dairy farm. In the early years, the yield was only about one ton per acre. By 1959, the yield had increased to two tons per acre because of hybrid research performed at Purdue University. Two tons of popcorn was equivalent to 100 bushels per acre of corn. Advertisements for mail-order sales of Kuenzi popcorn were placed in many national publications.

In June of 1918, John Kuenzi Jr. was inducted into the U.S. Army. After finishing basic training at Camp Wheeler in Georgia, he traveled by ship to

Liverpool, England. John Kuenzi Jr. arrived in Liverpool thirteen days after the fighting in World War I ended. He was then stationed in France until he sailed for home in July of 1919.

After World War I ended, at the age of twenty-eight, John Kuenzi Jr. met Mrs. Almeta Clinesmith and married her in 1923. Her maiden name was Almeta Rosenbaum. She was divorced from Mr. Clinesmith and had a nine-year-old daughter, Virginia M. Clinesmith. John and Almeta had no children together and divorced in 1935. She married William A. Weise in 1937.

Every day, their forty milk cows had to be milked by hand. In 1919, they were one of the first farms in the Fairbury area to purchase a milking machine.

Joe Kuenzi never married. He was a member of the Mohammed Shrine at Peoria and played clarinet with the Shriner's band for parades and conventions all over the country. He also played for years with a widely known area dance orchestra.

In 1924, John Kuenzi Sr. died in Fairbury at age sixty. His funeral was a large one with people traveling from several states to attend. After his death, his two sons continued the Kuenzi Dairy business.

The two Kuenzi brothers established an airport at their dairy farm. The runway was in the north and south directions. The brothers helped to organize the Prairie Farm Land Flying Farmers group in 1946. In 1962, the brothers were chosen Flying Farmers of the Year for Illinois. They also were active members of the International Flying Farmers and attended seventeen international conventions in the United States and Canada.

As demand continued to increase for their popcorn, the Kuenzi's expanded their popcorn production to 160 acres. The invention and introduction of the television to American homes dramatically reduced the demand for popcorn. People stayed home to watch TV instead of going to the movie house and buying popcorn. Theaters in small towns closed all across the United States. The Kuenzi operation reduced their 160 acres of popcorn down to only eighty-four acres by 1959.

In 1935, Kuenzi Dairy stopped making residential deliveries of milk. They continued to sell milk to a cheese factory after they stopped delivery to Fairbury homes. Area farmers gradually purchased all of the forty milk cows they had at the farm.

As more and more houses started to infringe upon their farm, the brothers had to close their airport runway in 1964. They also discontinued growing popcorn at that time.

The last few years of their lives, the Kuenzi brothers wintered together in Florida. They joked they had become CBM farmers (corn, beans, and Miami). Joseph Kuenzi died in 1969 at the age of seventy-two in Daytona Beach, Florida. His obituary noted that a nephew and two nieces were reared in the Kuenzi home. They were Andrew Zimmerman, Mrs. Caroline Slagel, and Mrs. Norma Hoffman.

John Kuenzi Jr. died at the Fairview Haven nursing home in Fairbury in 1978 at the age of eighty-three. Both brothers were buried in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery.

The Kuenzi family left their mark on Fairbury. Two generations of Fairbury citizens enjoyed their milk and popcorn. A popcorn maker than used Joe Kuenzi's popcorn at the Fairbury Fair and races has been restored, and Kuenzi descendants own it. Local collectors avidly seek glass milk bottles from the Kuenzi Dairy. In area auctions, a Kuenzi Dairy glass bottle typically sells for over \$100.



The restored popcorn popper that was used at the Fairbury Fair and races is owned by Tresa Maul, left, and her daughters, Marti Baurer, and Riley Maul. They are descendents of the Kuenzi family.

## **CHAPTER 39**

### **Little Joe's Grocery Store**

#### **Fairbury Grocery Store in the 1930s**

Dominic Giancarli was born in Italy in 1901. In 1927, at the age of 26, he emigrated from Italy to the Detroit, Michigan, area. He got a job with the Ford Motor Company as an autoworker. When the Great Depression started in 1929, he was laid off from his autoworker job. His future father-in-law suggested that he move to Fairbury and work with him in the Cooperative Coal mine. This coal mine was located at the entrance to the Timber Ridge subdivision. It closed in 1941.

Shortly after he got to Fairbury, Dominic married Sarah E. Mattioli of Fairbury in 1930. She was born in 1909 in Switzerland. When she was only two months old, she came with her parents from Switzerland to Fairbury.

Dominic and Sarah Giancarli had one son, Joseph Giancarli. They had two daughters, Marie, and Sylvia Ann Giancarli. Unfortunately, Sylvia died at the age of six in 1948. Sylvia, a first-grader at Edison school, fell off the slide at recess on a cold January day. She struck her head on the ice when she landed. She was rushed to a Chicago hospital but died from the fall.

Dominic and Sarah Giancarli saved their money and decided to start up a grocery store. Their business partner was Sarah's uncle, Joseph Mattioli. They each contributed \$600 to get the grocery store business started in 1935.

For their grocery store location, they chose a house located at the southwest corner of Route 24 and South Webster Street. This house no longer stands, and the Circle K gas station now occupies this location. Because Joseph Mattioli was diminutive in stature, they named it "Little Joe's" grocery store. Sarah Giancarli acted as the main store proprietor because she was good at bookwork. Uncle Joe Mattioli served as the silent business partner.

Dominic and Sarah Giancarli lived on South Fourth Street. Each morning she would get up at 5:30 AM and walk to her corner grocery store. The store was open seven days a week. Dominic would walk to his job as a coal miner on South Seventh Street.

Their daughter, Marie Giancarli Stahl, would have a cup of coffee and a piece of toast for breakfast. She then walked to Edison School at the northeast corner of Fourth Street and Route 24.

The house the store was in had a screened porch that faced east. One side of the porch was for boxes of food and produce. Bananas hung from the ceiling. The other side of the porch had many containers of soda pop and miscellaneous items.

The small grocery stores of that era did not have a wide selection of items like the massive stores of today. In the center of Uncle Joe's market was a stove to keep the area warm. At the end of the workday, men would gather around the stove to chat and visit.

The store also had a long meat case. The bottom shelf held pork chops and steaks. The top shelf was for the cold cuts, including baloney, minced ham, and cheese. Marie's father told her she should never eat any cold cuts except boiled ham. Her mother never served cold cuts at a family meal. Cookies were not sold in sealed sacks like they are today. Instead, you got a brown paper bag and selected which cookies you wanted to put in your bag.

By the counter was a pop bottle machine filled with ice to keep the bottles cold. There was no mechanical refrigeration yet, so the ice was used to keep the bottles chilled.

After the workday was over, men would come to the neighborhood grocery store to buy items for the next day's lunch. They would often buy a few slices of lunch meat and a Twinkie. The store had a mechanical cash register. When Marie helped in the store, she would write down all the items a customer purchased on a brown paper bag. Marie would add up the items in her head to get the total amount of the bill. There were also no shopping carts in that era.

Marie's uncle had a large strawberry patch. She hated to pick all those strawberries to then sell in the grocery store for twenty-five cents. As a little girl, Marie had many neighborhood friends. She could come into the back door of any neighborhood house, walk through the house, and exit through the front door with nobody objecting to her visit.

Most of the houses in Fairbury at that time had a garden that started at the back door and ran back to the alley. Indoor plumbing was still not prevalent, so many houses still had an outhouse. Marie remembers that many of the outhouses had a Sears & Roebuck catalog in them instead of toilet paper.

In 1942, Fairbury had nine different grocery stores. These included Frank's Market, Harper's Grocery, Walton's Grocery, Kroger 3rd Street Grocery, Werling's Meat Market, Rabe's Grocery, City Meat Market, and Little Joe's Market.

In 1949, bandits held-up Little Joe's grocery store on a Saturday night at 9 PM. Dominic Giancarli was working in the store that night. Two men entered the store and demanded money. One had a gun. Giancarli gave the bandits \$200 cash. A roadblock was set-up, but the bandits were never apprehended.

In 1950, after fifteen years of operation, Little Joe's market closed. Dominic Giancarli died in 1978. His wife, Sarah Giancarli, died in 1990.

The era of Little Joe's market offers a glimpse into a past era that was much different than today. In those times, nine little grocery stores were used by Fairbury citizens. Mechanical refrigeration and indoor plumbing were not yet on the scene. Today, Dave's Supermarket has an almost infinite selection of items from around the world. Everyone also has refrigerators and indoor plumbing. In many ways, life is much easier today in Fairbury than it was in the 1930s.

## **TO DISCONTINUE MILK ROUTE**

Owing to the government regulations on tires and  
inner tubes

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 31**

is the last day we will make delivery in the residence  
district.

Milk from the Meyer Dairy will be found at the  
following places of business:

A. Rediger's Café      Bill's Tavern  
Decker's Café          Frank's Market  
Joe Tandy at Standard Oil Station  
Corner of 24 and First St.

**MEYER DAIRY**

Sam Meyer, Prop.

## **TO DISCONTINUE MILK ROUTE**

Owing to the government regulations on tires and  
inner tubes

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 31**

we will discontinue our milk route in the residence  
of Fairbury. Milk from the Oakwood Dairy will be  
found in the following stores:

Harper's Grocery      Werling's Meat Market  
Hotaling's Grocery    Rabe's Grocery  
Walton's Grocery      City Meat Market  
Kroger 3<sup>rd</sup> St. Grocery   Little Joe's

**M. D. FUGATE**

Prop. Oakwood Dairy

1942 Blade ad showing all grocery stores in  
Fairbury



## **CHAPTER 40**

### **Don Karnes**

#### **Fairbury's Most Famous Sports Celebrity**

William Henry Karnes was born in 1841 in Kentucky. He married Sarah "Sally" Dixon from County Mayo, Ireland. In about 1870, they moved their family with seven children to Fairbury.

William Karnes was appointed a Fairbury village constable. While he was intoxicated in 1874, he became engaged in an altercation with John McKay. Karnes cut him in the abdomen, and he later died from this wound. A trial was held at the Livingston County courthouse in Pontiac. The jury returned a verdict of guilty of manslaughter, and the prison sentence was ten years. He later became the janitor of the South Side school. When that school caught fire in 1896, William died trying to help the firemen put out the fire. He was buried at Graceland.

One of William Karnes' sons was Thomas Dixon Karnes. In 1894, he married Nettie M. Lough at Milwaukee, Wisconsin. One of their children Thomas Don Karnes was born in Fairbury in 1902.

Thomas Dixon Karnes was a well respected Fairbury businessman. He was the manager of the Farmers Grain Company for thirty-three years. When the Great Depression started in 1929, investors across the country lost confidence in the banks. In June of 1930, the largest bank in Fairbury, the Fairbury Bank, closed its doors. Depositors eventually received 51% of their money back. For the rest of 1930, Fairbury only had one bank operating, the Farmer's State Bank of Fairbury.

In 1931, Thomas Dixon Karnes re-opened the closed Fairbury Bank and renamed it the Fairbury State Bank. He served as President of this bank. He died in 1945.

Thomas Don Karnes grew up on south Third Street, just a couple houses north of the fairgrounds. He attended Fairbury schools. Don was a star athlete at Fairbury Township High School. He lettered on the undefeated

football team of 1917 and captained the 1919 team. The 1918 season was canceled because of the influenza epidemic during World War I. After high school graduation, he worked one year on the railroad to earn money for college. Karnes enrolled at the University of Illinois at Urbana in the fall of 1921 and graduated in June of 1925.

Red Grange was born in 1903, so he was just one year younger than Don Karnes. Red Grange was arguably the best football player to ever play for the University of Illinois football team. In his biggest college game, Red Grange scored five touchdowns against the arch-rival Michigan team. Red went on to play for the Chicago Bears and helped to start the National Football League. Don Karnes played on the same football team with Red Grange at the University of Illinois. He suffered a knee injury which ended his football career.

Don Karnes made the University of Illinois varsity basketball team as a sophomore for the 1922-23 season. He played the forward position. The record for the 1922-23 squad was nine wins and six losses over-all. Their Big Ten conference record was seven wins and five losses.

The 1923-24 season was the best for Don Karnes and the Fighting Illini basketball team. Their record was eleven wins and six losses overall. Their conference record was eight wins and four losses. They shared the Big 10 conference title with Wisconsin and Chicago. All three teams had identical conference results with eight wins and four losses. Karnes lettered in basketball at the University of Illinois.

After graduating from the University of Illinois and lettering in basketball, Don Karnes accepted the job of head football coach at Illinois State Normal University in Normal, Illinois. He was the youngest man to act as a head coach for a major college. He served as the head football coach for two seasons, from 1925 to 1926, and compiled a record of five wins and ten losses. Karnes was also the head basketball coach at Illinois State from 1925 to 1927. His basketball team record was nine wins and twenty losses.

Don Karnes resigned from his ISU coaching positions in early 1927. He decided to enter the insurance field in Bloomington with William M. Anderson. He worked in the insurance field until he retired in 1969. Karnes became the football coach at St. Mary's high school. He also

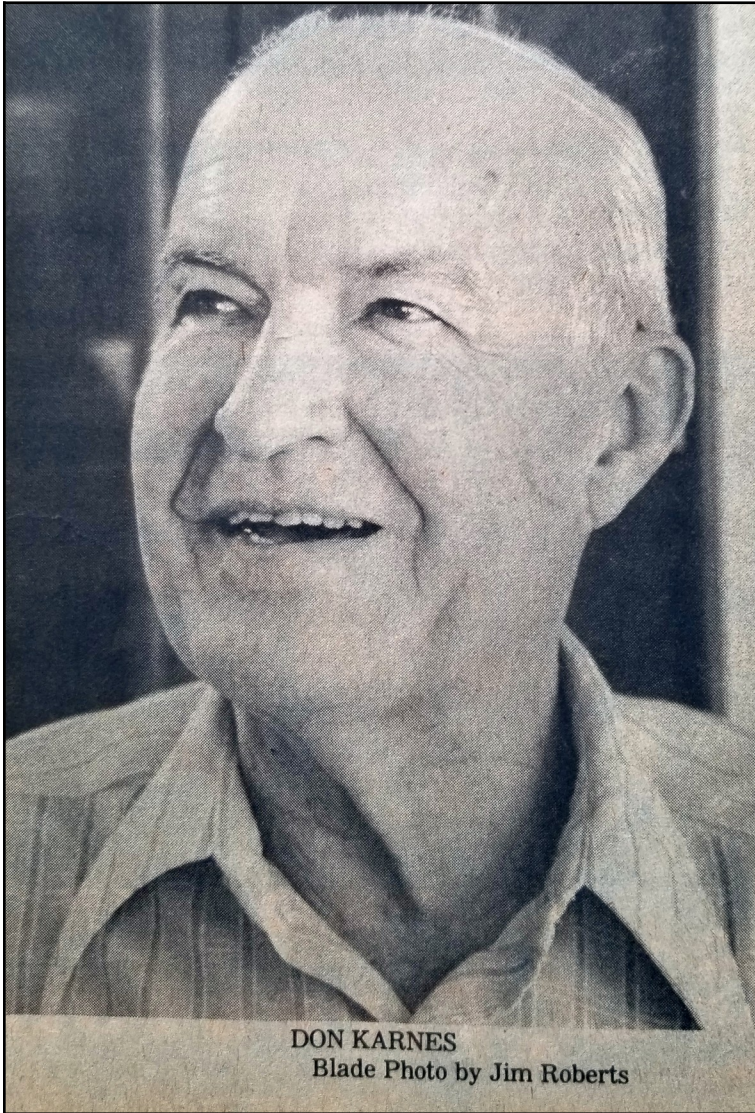
coached at Trinity high school and Wesleyan college. In about 1931, Karnes married Leta Maxine Stucker. Don met her while he was at the University of Illinois. Don and Leta had no children and divorced sometime after 1946.

In 1942, Don Karnes enlisted in the Naval Reserve as a Lieutenant. He was eventually placed in charge of all service schools at the Great Lakes naval training station. He was released from the service after the war as a Lieutenant Commander. After the war, Don returned to the insurance industry. In 1949, he resumed working for the State of Illinois insurance examiners office. He was promoted to Chief Examiner before retiring in 1969.

While working as the Chief Examiner, he returned to his Chicago apartment one night to find it full of Chicago police officers. They arrested him on a variety of narcotics charges. Don's friend, Bob Weidrich, a Chicago police reporter, helped prove that Don was "set-up" on the drug charges. The narcotics charges were dropped. The set-up effort was traced to a firm where Karnes had uncovered violations of state insurance department regulations.

After retirement, Karnes continued to be interested in athletics. He traveled to every Olympic Games after World War II, except the 1980 games in Russia, which were boycotted. Don was a tireless spectator at Fairbury high school sports events. He helped several Fairbury students get into college. He also had a basketball court built at one of his Fairbury homes south of the Fairbury Hospital, so the local kids had a place to play basketball. Karnes donated several items to the Fairbury Echoes Museum. One of these donations was an extremely rare 1872 five-dollar bill issued by the First National Bank of Fairbury.

Upon his death in 1982, Karnes established a scholarship fund for Fairbury high school students. Each year, scholarships are awarded to local students. Karnes is remembered as one of Fairbury's sports celebrities who was also very generous to his hometown students.



DON KARNES  
Blade Photo by Jim Roberts

## **CHAPTER 41**

### **Underground Fairbury**

#### **Fairbury's Underground Businesses**

Early Fairbury had many small one-person type businesses. These included barbers, tailors, shoe repairers, lunchrooms, and bathhouses. These small businesses did not require much floor space, and they could not justify a large building. A perfect option for these small businesses was to rent space in the basement of the conventional business buildings.

The business buildings on Locust Street used coal to heat them until the 1950s. These businesses needed an easy way to get coal delivered to the basement where the boilers were located. One solution was to build a coal bin under the sidewalk in front of the building. A removable manhole was placed in the concrete of the sidewalk. A horse-drawn coal wagon could drive up next to the manhole, and coal could be delivered down the manhole into the basement coal bin.

Many buildings were planned to have both basement businesses and coal bins. The entrance to the basement business was an opening in the sidewalk with a stairway going to the basement. Some of the basement businesses had plate-glass storefront windows similar to the upper-level businesses. The coal bin was walled off from the basement business entrance to keep the dirty coal dust away from patrons. The December 1894 Blade published an article describing the new Odd Fellows Temple that was going to be built. The article said the basement would be fitted up for barbershops and other businesses.

The Sanborn Insurance Company published a series of maps of Fairbury between the years of 1885 and 1911. These maps show most of the businesses on the north side of Locust Street had basements under the sidewalks in front of the buildings.

Many of these small basement businesses advertised in the Third Street Opera House program booklets. One of these was the Star Lunch Room, under G. Y. McDowell's Bank, with Harry Olmstead as the Proprietor.

Another basement business was Ellis's Barber Shop with three barbers and bathrooms under the Fairbury Bank. A third Opera House program advertisement was for the Fairbury Suititorium. The ad noted that Joe Myers did not shine or ruin your goods in pressing, and clothes were called for and delivered under the office of Dr. Lewis.

Early barbershops offered a unique bath service. For a small fee, a traveler, farmhand, or others lacking access to a refreshing tub could soak and scrub in solitary splendor.

A series of at least three barbershops were located in the basement of Walton's. These included C. W. Keck, Frank Wharton, and Jay Tyler. A 1921 Blade article recounted that two men were leaning against the railing leading down to Tyler's underground barbershop. Suddenly, the railing gave way, and the two men went tumbling halfway down the stairs leading to the basement barbershop.

Frank Joda operated his tailor shop for eleven years under the Fairbury Shoe Store. He chose to keep his business underground and relocated to space under the Fairbury Bank. Joda was in the tailoring business for more than fifty years. The last tailoring work he performed was just ten days before his death at age seventy-four in 1940. Photographs still exist of Frank in his underground tailor business.

The last of the basement businesses closed in 1963 when Henry Troehler retired from his barbershop that operated under what was then Mary Gunn's Fashion Shop. This location was the second building east of Third Street. Henry went to live in the Illinois Odd Fellows Home where he died several months later. When he left, the last of the basement entrances were boarded over, and the underground Fairbury faded from view and memory.

Coal heating was replaced with natural gas boilers or furnaces starting in the 1950s. The coal bins were no longer needed. Many businesses, such as Bob Nussbaum Plumbing, used the coal bins for storage areas.

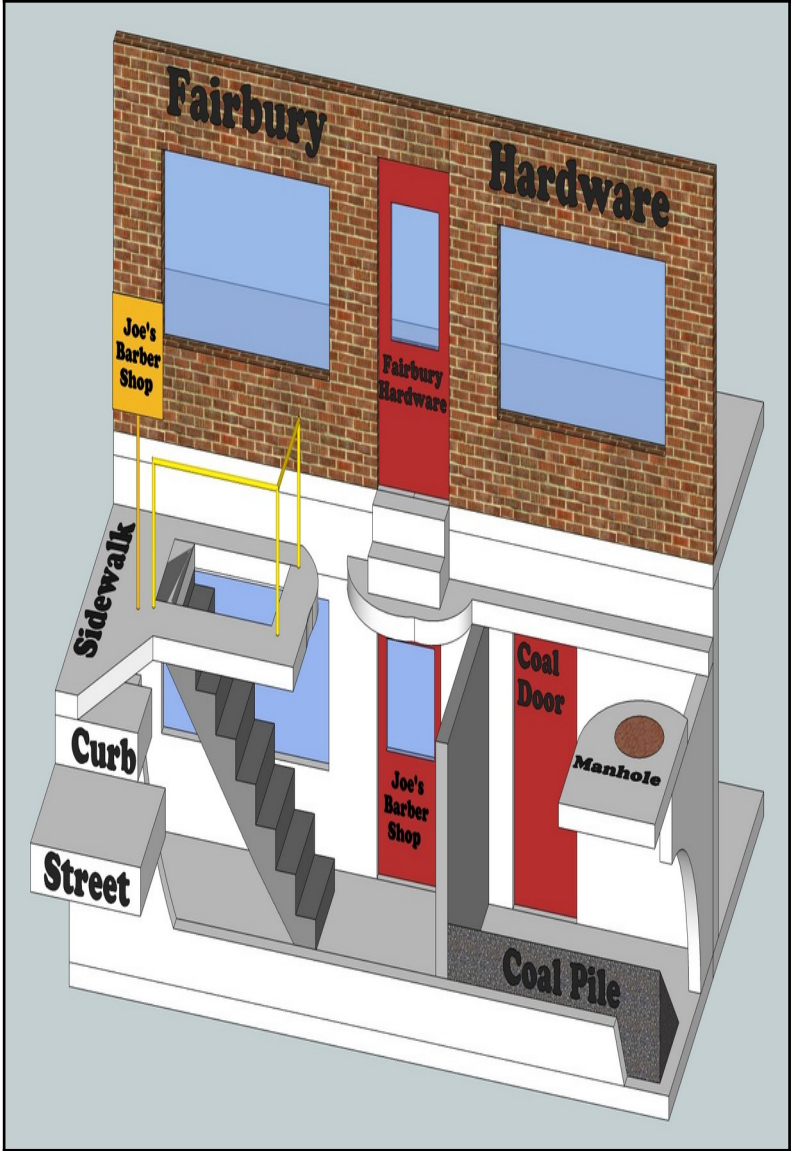
The Fairbury area has a relatively high water table, and deep basements often are flooded with water. To minimize flooded basements, the buildings on the north side of Locust Street were designed with the basements as shallow as possible. The shallow basements resulted in

relatively high curbs on Locust Street. These high curbs were not a problem for horses, but automobiles often hit the curbs and started to break the sidewalks.

To solve the high curb problem, the decision was made in 1970 to fill all of the chambers under the sidewalks with sand and make a two-step lower street curb design. This work was completed in 1971.

One of the remnants of Fairbury's underground businesses is many old photographs. Some of these show the street level railings for the stairs leading to the basement businesses. Other old photos show what these small businesses looked like. Advertisements for these underground businesses are shown in some of the Third Street Opera House programs. Many of these items documenting Fairbury's interesting subterranean businesses can be viewed at the Fairbury Echoes Museum.

The illustration on the next page shows how the underground businesses were designed.





## **CHAPTER 42**

### **Dominy Memorial Library**

#### **Dominy Memorial Library Still Vibrant in the 21st century**

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to Indiana. John and Henry Marsh discovered coal in 1862. The combination of the railroad, the coal mines, and a rich agricultural area caused the population to boom from only 262 citizens in 1860 to 2,187 in 1900.

As Fairbury entered the twentieth century, it was a booming town, but it had no public library. One of the most prominent businessmen in Fairbury in that era was Thomas A. Beach. He was a banker who accumulated over \$50 million by the time of his death in 1911. He built the Beach house with the two lions in the front yard on East Hickory Street.

Beach's partner in his banking operation was his nephew, Lorenzo Beach Dominy. In addition to being a prominent businessman of Fairbury, Lorenzo served as the Mayor of Fairbury. Lorenzo married Phoebe Ann Curl in 1864. They had several children with the youngest named Hazel Dominy. Lorenzo Dominy doted over his youngest daughter Hazel. Just two months after her seventeenth birthday, Hazel contracted typhoid fever and quickly died.

Both Lorenzo and his wife Phoebe Dominy were heartbroken about the death of their seventeen-year-old daughter, Hazel. They decided to build a library in Fairbury in Hazel's memory. They selected a site for the new library at the southeast corner of Third and Walnut streets.

Just one year after daughter Hazel's death, Lorenzo Dominy died in 1902. He died before construction of the new library was started. Phoebe Dominy was in mourning for the loss of her daughter Hazel and her husband, Lorenzo Dominy.

Two other prominent Fairbury businessmen in that era were Isaac and J.W. Walton. They owned and operated the Walton Bros. department store in

Fairbury. After the death of Lorenzo Dominy, they announced they were investigating donating a library to Fairbury. This announcement forced Phoebe Dominy to quickly proceed on her plan to build a new library in memory of her daughter Hazel.

In May of 1904, Alderman William R. Bane made a proposal to the Fairbury City Council on behalf of his mother-in-law, Mrs. L. B Dominy. Mrs. Dominy proposed that she would donate a new public library to Fairbury if her seven conditions were met. Phoebe Dominy proposed tearing down the current buildings at the southeast corner of Third and Walnut streets. She would then approve the design and erect a new brick or stone structure for an approximate cost of \$13,000. This amount would be equivalent to \$367,000 in today's dollars.

She also proposed she would stock the new library with books and she would start construction within ninety days. She estimated the completion date would be January 1, 1905. Mrs. Dominy reserved the right to name the library, to approve the first Board of Directors, and approve the rules and regulations for the new library. She also requested the city pay all the library's utility bills. Her last stipulation was that the City of Fairbury would maintain it as a free public library. The City Council accepted her proposal.

Mrs. Dominy hired Paul O. Moratz of Bloomington as the architect. He designed libraries for Edwardsville, El Paso, Fairbury, Farmington, Greenville, Paxton, Pekin and many other small to medium-size communities. The library has a unique architecture with a large dome for the reading room. Inside the dome is a large reading room, with a fireplace and a clock.

Construction started in the Fall of 1904. By the Spring of 1905, the new library was finished. The new library was dedicated to the memory of Hazel and Lorenzo Dominy on June 12, 1905.

Since 1900, the population of Fairbury has grown from 2,187 to the current level around 3,800 people. Computers and the advent of the Internet have also changed the technologies of libraries. Around 2010, the Board of Directors decided it was time to expand and modernize the old 1905 library. A successful fund-raising campaign was conducted to raise

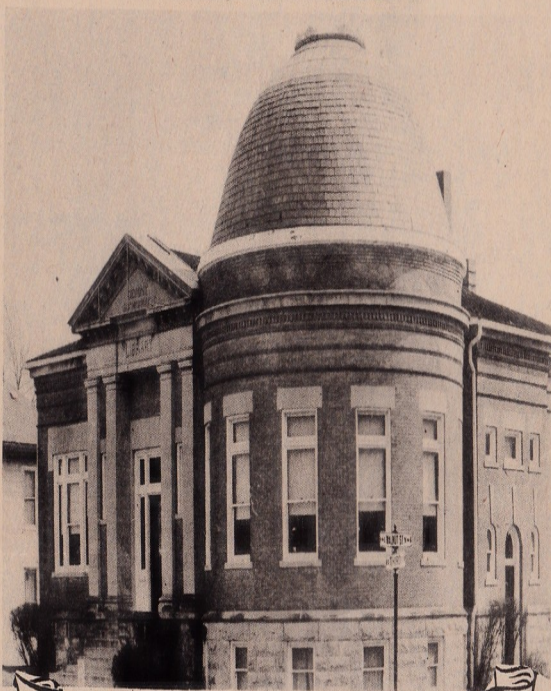
the necessary \$2.4 million for the library modifications. The square footage of the old library was doubled to 132,000 square feet. The dedication of the renovated library took place in April of 2012.

Taxpayer funds are used to cover the basic operating expenses of the library. The Friends of Dominy Memorial Library Inc. is a non-profit 501(C)3 organization that supports the library. The purpose of this charity organization is to promote the library in the community, sponsor community events and activities, encourage gifts, encourage endowments and memorials, promote volunteer activities, and to act as an advocate for the library.

The Dominy Memorial Library has maps of the area cemeteries. Their web site has an option to search Fairbury area cemeteries to perform family genealogical searches.

For many years, copies of the Blade newspaper were mailed to the University of Illinois for microfilming. The resultant rolls of microfilm were stored in drawers at the Dominy Memorial Library. Patrons of the library could view the rolls using a microfilm viewing machine. A few years ago, the microfilm viewing machine broke. Rather than repairing a machine that is now almost obsolete, the decision was made to digitize the Blade. An outside firm scanned the old rolls of microfilm. Through several charitable donations, the funds were raised to digitize the old Blades back to 1871. Using a link from the library's web site, customers can now search all of the old Blade newspapers free of charge.

After 114 years of existence, Fairbury's Dominy Memorial Library continues to play a vibrant role in the community. About seventy-five people visit the library every day and check-out about ninety items. There are 1,511 resident and non-resident library cardholders. The library currently has 24,599 circulation items, and 40,623 items were loaned last year. This past summer, seventy-six adults and 247 children participated in the summer reading program.



DOMINY MEMORIAL LIBRARY, corner of Third and Walnut, is one of the 17 local structures cited as historical monuments by Illinois Historical Society. The building was built in 1904 in memory of Hazel Dominy who died at age seventeen.

Blade Photo

## **CHAPTER 43**

### **Ziegenhorn**

#### **Title: Fairbury Farm Equipment Dealers for Fifty-Two Years**

Samuel Henry Ziegenhorn was born in 1856 in Alsace-Lorraine, France. His parents were Christian H. Ziegenhorn and Anna D. Schmidt. This family came to America in 1865 and lived at various times in Peoria, Morton, and Cissna Park. In 1879, Samuel married Miss Elizabeth Zimmerman in Pontiac, Illinois.

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Ziegenhorn settled on a farm six miles southeast of Fairbury. They had twelve children. In 1909, they moved to a farm near Muscatine, Iowa. They farmed there until 1918 when he retired, and they moved to town. Samuel Ziegenhorn passed away in 1942. His wife Elizabeth died in 1958 in Muscatine.

One of Samuel and Elizabeth's twelve children was Aaron F. Ziegenhorn. He was born in 1881 in Fairbury. He married Nathalia "Nettie" Lambert Ramseyer in Peoria in 1909. Nettie was the daughter of Jacob Ramseyer and Mary Steidinger. She was born in a sod hut in Harper, Kansas. Her parents were from Forrest, but they tried farming in Kansas on a homestead claim. When her parent's dry-dirt farming experience proved less than successful, the family returned to Fairbury.

After Aaron and Nettie were married, they began farming in Eliza Township. This township was in Mercer County in the northwest part of the state along the Mississippi River. Their first two of six children were born in Mercer County. Then they returned to the Fairbury area and operated a farm four miles northwest of Fairbury.

In 1929, Aaron and his family moved to town in Fairbury. Aaron Ziegenhorn began working in the farm implement section of Walton's Department store. This implement division was located in what is now Antiques and Uniques. Aaron's son Cliff Ziegenhorn also joined the implement department with his father. Aaron worked for Walton's for eleven years. In 1939, Walton's decided to exit the farm implement

business. Aaron and his son Cliff took over the implement business and the John Deere dealership. They named their new company Ziegenhorn and Son. They moved the business to the G. Y. McDowell building north of Walton's on Third Street. That building came with a safe from G. Y. McDowell's banking business.

In those early years of the business, farmers often traded many items towards the purchase of a new tractor. They often traded livestock, other machinery, or bushels of grain to make the purchase.

Aaron and his wife, Nettie, had six children. The oldest son, Cliff Ziegenhorn was born in 1912. The next oldest son, John William Ziegenhorn, was born in 1923. Their youngest son was Robert Lee Ziegenhorn who was born in 1927. All three boys attended Fairbury schools. Robert was one of the most fabled athletes in Fairbury's high-school history. He won eleven of a possible twelve letters at Fairbury Township High School.

The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii plunged Fairbury into World War II.

Cliff Ziegenhorn attempted to enlist in the Army, but they would not take him because he had suffered from polio. John W. Ziegenhorn entered the Army Engineers in 1943 at Scott Field, Illinois. He served in the European Theatre. He was discharged from Camp Grant in 1946 as a Sergeant.

Robert L. Ziegenhorn entered the Army Infantry in July of 1945 at Fort Sheridan in Illinois. He was discharged in November of 1946 at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, as a Technician Fifth Grade. In the U.S. Army, Robert was undefeated as a pitcher for the Truck Battalion, 35th Quartermaster Corps., at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

After the war ended, both John and Robert joined their brother Cliff in the family business. They had to change the name to Ziegenhorn and Sons because three sons were now involved with the company.

Robert played with two area semi-pro baseball teams. Those teams were Larry's Farmalls, sponsored by Larry LaRoche's dealership in Chatsworth; and Leo Lamb's Pontiac Stone team. The Washington

Senators of the American League were interested in Robert, who by then had a bone chip in his elbow. Robert elected to stay with the family business in Fairbury.

In 1962, Ziegenhorn & Sons decided they had outgrown their old facility on 3rd Street north of Walton's. They needed more space to assemble larger machines, for maintenance of customers' machines, and their essential parts business. They also required larger lots to display equipment for sale. They decided to build a new facility west of Fairbury on Route 24. They purchased the land from Jay Carter. Construction was started on the new 120 foot by 90-foot building in December of 1962. They moved the G. Y. McDowell safe from their old building to their new building. On March 9, 1964, they held an Open House ceremony in their new facility.

In May of 1964, company founder Aaron Ziegenhorn passed away in Fairbury at age eighty-two. The Blade noted that Aaron was one of Fairbury's senior businessmen who served the needs of area farmers for over thirty-five years. The Blade also recounted that Aaron was a calm and friendly person who added much to Fairbury's community esprit de corps. His wife, Nettie Ziegenhorn, passed away in 1979.

The first of the three brothers to pass away was Robert L. Ziegenhorn in 1992 at age 65. His death prompted the two remaining brothers to decide to liquidate the family business. Ziegenhorn and Sons had been in business for fifty-two years. One of the longest-serving employees was Everett Wenger, who started with the firm in 1951. The massive liquidation sale was held in January of 1993. Mike White bought the land and buildings used by the business. This site is now the home of Alexander Lumber, and the G. Y. McDowell safe is still used every day.

Cliff Ziegenhorn passed away in 1996 at age eighty-four. The last brother to pass away was John Ziegenhorn in 2013 at age 90. Ziegenhorn and Sons were a primary contributor to the success of Fairbury area farmers for over fifty years.

# JOHN DEERE

FOX

HAHN SPRAYERS

KEWANEE



Bob, Cliff, John

**Fairbury, Illinois 61739**

Route 24 WEST

(815) 692-2358





Walton Department Store

Fairbury, Illinois

JOHN DEERE QUALITY FARM EQUIPMENT

Fairbury 5/1-36

Model A, Tractor, w/

Rubber tires - 1150.00

Cultivator No 298 135.00

Power Shift 50.00

1335.00

Freight & Tax - 60.00

1395.00

Finance Chg 21.40

\$ 1416.40

Trade in

Brown Horse - 100.00

Big Bull 60.

Young " 40.

2-Towers 50.

Fresh Cow 60.

Dry Cow 40.

Fordson 15.

Titan 15.

Single Row. 140.

520.00

520.00

\$ 896.40

over



At this store you get Quality and Service



## **CHAPTER 44**

### **Carl Eilers**

#### **Father of Stereo FM Radio and Television from Fairbury**

John George Eilers was born in Germany in 1861. When he was twenty-nine years old in 1890, John G. Eilers emigrated from Germany to the Flanagan, Illinois area. After a short time, he decided America would remain his new home. John G. Eilers then returned to Germany and claimed Miss Anna Fecht as his bride. They returned to the Flanagan area, where he farmed for forty years. They had seven children. John G. Eilers died in Flanagan in 1931.

One of those seven children was John Tjark Eilers. He was born in 1893 in Flanagan. He married Helena M. Wilsky, and they moved to Fairbury. They had four children. Their only daughter was Marie Louise Eilers. Their three sons were Carl Gerhardt Eilers, Paul Walter Eilers, and Arnold John Eilers.

Marie Eilers married Lyle Maxwell. She became a nurse, and they lived thirteen years in East Lansing, Michigan. They then moved and spent the rest of their lives in DeKalb, Illinois. She died in 2008.

All three brothers attended Fairbury Township High School. Paul and Carl were World War II veterans. Both Paul and Carl served in the U.S. Navy. After World War II ended, Paul Eilers received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Industrial Arts from ISU in 1951. Paul went on to earn two different Master's degrees. In 1956, he received a Master's degree in Industrial Education from Bradley. In 1969, Paul received a Master's degree in Audio-Visual Education from Arizona State University. Paul taught for thirty-two years at Reavis High School, in Burbank, Illinois. He was also a golf coach at that school. After he retired from teaching, he moved back to Fairbury.

In 1991, at the age of sixty-four, he married Phyllis A. Garrelts. She was the widow of Art Smith. Paul Eilers died at the age of sixty-seven in 1995 at Fairbury.

Brother Arnold John Eilers never married and ran a landscaping business in Fairbury. He died at age forty-one in 1969.

When Carl G. Eilers was a boy in Fairbury, a relative gave him a gift of a glass wireless radio set. This wireless set captured Carl's imagination and started his lifelong interest in electronics.

After Carl finished his military service in World War II, he entered Purdue University. Carl decided to pursue his boyhood fascination with electronics and obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering from Purdue in 1948. He joined Zenith Electronics in 1948 in Chicago as an Electrical Engineer in the Research Department. His first job assignments were to work on the development of subscription television and Zenith Phonevision.

Subscription television would now be known as cable television. Subscribers pay a monthly fee to get access to television shows. The concept behind Zenith's Phonevision involved making Hollywood films available to home viewers at \$1 per movie. Viewers were required to purchase a descrambler unit that sat on top of the television. The descrambler unit plugged into the TV's antenna leads and also into the telephone line. Someone wishing to view a movie would call the Phonevision operator, who would add them to the viewer queue. A signal sent via phone lines would allow the box to descramble the signal. At the end of the month, viewers were billed for the movie on their regular telephone bill. Some of Zenith's 1951 model TV sets were equipped with a special connector for the Phonevision system. There was also a section in the owner's manual explaining the Phonevision concept. The manual provided instructions on how to order, and a schedule for film broadcasts.

Carl G. Eilers married Sandra J. Mahler. They had two children. Carl continued his education while working for Zenith by attending night school. He received a Master's Degree in Electrical Engineering from Northwestern University. Carl was very successful at Zenith and worked his way up to Division Chief of Circuits and Communications Research in 1961. By 1977, he became the Manager of Zenith's Research & Development Department. During his career at Zenith, Carl worked on the

development of remote controls, laser disc recording, supplemental audio programming, and high-definition television.

The first few years that Carl worked for Zenith, he commuted from Fairbury to the Zenith office in Chicago. He obtained his first five U.S. Patents at Zenith when his home address was still Fairbury. Carl went on to receive a total of 21 U.S. Patents while he worked for Zenith. After fifty years of service, Carl retired from Zenith in 1997. After he formally retired, he continued to work for Zenith as a consultant.

When Carl died in 2008, the Chicago Tribune newspaper ran a special article honoring his accomplishments in the radio and television industry. This article recounted that Carl was a fifty-year employee of Zenith, and he helped to produce high-fidelity stereo sound over the airwaves, or FM stereo broadcasting. Before 1961, only phonographs could generate that type of high-quality audio. The stereo FM standard he co-developed was first adopted by the Federal Communications Commission in 1961 and is still in use today around the world.

Carl's colleagues recounted that he developed many core concepts that are still used today in the television industry. These included scrambling a signal and then unscrambling that signal if you paid for it. They also noted that Carl could envision what industry changes would take place many years in the future.

After Carl's death, he was called the "Father of Stereo FM Radio and Stereo Television Sound," for his pioneering work during his 50-year career at Zenith. Carl was a lifelong member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. Eilers also received many industry honors, including the IEEE Fellow Award, the Masaura Ibuka Consumer Electronics Award, the Audio Engineering Society Fellow Award, and the R&D 100 Award. In the year 2000, Carl was inducted in the charter class of the Consumer Electronics Hall of Fame. This charter class also included Marconi, Armstrong, DeForest, Fessenden, and Hertz. Carl's fascination with that glass wireless radio set he received as a young boy in Fairbury spawned an electronics career that improved radio and television for the world.



Carl Eilers

## CHAPTER 45

### Early Health Challenges

#### Early Fairbury Settlers Challenged by Many Health Issues

Since we live in the 21st century, it is hard for us to appreciate the problems the first Fairbury area settlers faced with disease and consequently shortened life-spans.

One good example of this was the John Edward Bodley Sr. family. They came from Indiana to Fairbury in about 1852. This family had eight children and was plagued by premature deaths.

Edward died at four years old, Della at ten, Sara at twenty-two, Mary at twenty-five, Margaret at twenty-eight, John Jr. at fifty, Thomas at fifty-three, and William at sixty-five. This family lost three young girls within eighteen months of each other. Out of eight children, only one child outlived the parents. Unfortunately, we don't know the exact causes of the deaths in the Bodley family. Under Illinois law, death certificates were not required until after 1916. Since these deaths were in the 1870s, no death certificates exist to explain the reasons for all these deaths.

Lucille Goodrich was the Livingston County School Superintendent for many years. She wrote a book about Livingston county titled ***A Livingston County Scrapbook by Lucile Goodrich (1855-1975)***. Her book is mostly about school history, but she devoted one chapter to public health.

She noted that early settlers brought with them malaria, milk fever, and other diseases to add to those already found here. Malaria was called the ague, the shakes, the chills, bilious fever, intermittent or remittent typhoid, and autumnal fever.

Conditions were ideal for the development of malaria. Because the swampy land was not yet tilled to drain it, mosquitoes were plentiful. Quinine, used to cure the ague, caused the ears to roar and gave one a feeling of great weariness.

If a woman became proficient in caring for the sick, she was in high demand. She used home remedies usually made from herbs or applied poultices like a mustard plaster. Physicians were scarce and unschooled. Their chief "stock in trade" consisted of quinine, calomel, castor oil, laudanum, and camphor dissolved in alcohol. Until the invention of antibiotics in the early 1940s, doctors had very few means of healing patients. To instill the patient's confidence, medical doctors often dressed very stylishly, including top hats.

Taking baths and changing clothes were not always included in the day's schedule. Chewing tobacco and the subsequent "spitting" was common among adults. Alcoholic beverages were freely used both in sickness and in health.

Windows were not protected by any screening, and flies were abundant. Rats and roaches added their share. Some of the so-called "filth" diseases were typhoid, diphtheria, cholera, yellow fever, and smallpox.

In 1849 an epidemic of cholera swept through the county. Other illnesses such as pneumonia, influenza, consumption (tuberculosis), milk sickness, rheumatism, tetanus, food poisoning, and snakebite also flourished. The birth rate was high, but so was the death rate. A forty-year-old man or woman was considered old. It is estimated that half the children born in Illinois in pioneer days died before reaching five years of age, usually from digestive disorders.

Proper food was a problem. The Pioneers' primary sources of food came from hunting deer, wild turkey, pigeons, opossums, ducks, geese, and quail. Fishing also helped.

James P. Morgan, Long Point, said that when he came to this section of the country in 1854, wild game of all kinds was plentiful. He reported that he had seen as many as 100 deer in a herd.

The pioneers usually set aside Saturday as their weekly hunting day. As more settlers came, the game became scarce. Obtaining salt was another problem. Honey was important in the life of the pioneer. The honey bee was not native to Illinois. It was brought here by the settlers. There were



some vegetables grown; corn, pumpkins, cucumbers, cabbage, and tomatoes.

The cow was indispensable even though the milk sometimes caused sickness. Later, an orchard was to be a necessary adjunct to every farm. Storage, too, was a problem. Food was cooled in a bucket hung in the well or the sod-storm cellar or fruit house.

The pioneers had some weird remedies. Long ago, it was not unusual for a child to come to school with a homemade bag of asafetida tied on a string around his neck. This bag was for warding off disease, but the awful odor was enough to keep people at a distance.

Sulfur and molasses were given to children in the spring to purify their blood. Sassafras tea was also considered useful. Colds were treated with goose grease spread on the throat and chest. If the cough persisted, the child was put to bed, covered heavily, and given hot tea (sassafras, snakeroot, dogwood, willow) to make him sweat.

Warts were removed by various odd methods, such as rubbing the wart with a dishrag and then burying the dishrag.

The so-called "childhood diseases" (measles, whooping cough, chickenpox, mumps) were common among early settlers. A child attending school would contract the disease. This child would then pass it on to the entire room or school and to the other children at home.

Scarlet fever was prevalent. Smallpox was a dreaded disease. Sanitation was poor, and many unnecessary cases of typhoid fever developed. In 1849 cholera claimed many victims.

The doctors finally got some quarantine laws passed. When a child became sick, a big red sign giving the name of the disease was nailed on the front of his house. A member of the Board of Health was responsible for installing the sign. When the child recovered, the house had to be fumigated before the sign could be taken down. Once the sign was removed, the family could go outdoors again.

Fortunately, both sanitation methods and modern medicine were gradually improved. We can be very thankful we no longer have to face the many mysterious deaths that the families of our forefathers had to endure.



A well dressed Fairbury physician of 1866.

## **CHAPTER 46**

### **Horse Palace**

#### **John Virgin**

John Virgin (1838-1900) was one of Fairbury's most prominent citizens in the late 1800s. Mr. Virgin was a native of Indiana and was born in Carroll County on August 10, 1838. He was the son of Thomas and Lucinda (Girard) Virgin, who were natives of Ohio. Thomas Virgin was reared to manhood in Ohio, then moved to Indiana and was there married. He was a farmer by occupation and became a citizen of Illinois. In Illinois, he continued the cultivation of the soil up to the time of his death, which occurred in 1870.

John Virgin came with his parents to Illinois in 1854 and located near Pontiac, where he worked on a farm. In August of 1861, at the age of twenty-three, John Virgin enlisted in Company K of the 3rd Illinois Cavalry. Approximately ninety Fairbury area men served in Company K. He entered as a Private August 7, 1861, and was promoted Orderly Sergeant, in which capacity he acted for nearly three years. He participated in all the major battles of the West, and was taken prisoner November 25, 1863, at Vermillionville, La., and was held for thirty days when he was paroled. He remained on parole seven months, during part of which time he served as Quartermaster in the parole camp, and upon being exchanged remained in this capacity until the expiration of his term of service. John was discharged on September 4, 1864, at Springfield, Illinois. John Virgin served three years fighting for the Union Army in the Civil War.

After the war, John returned to Fairbury and was a tenant farmer in Avoca Township. He married Miss Serepta J. McDowell in the Spring of 1865. Serepta was born in Livingston County on April 5, 1842. She came from a pioneer family who settled in Avoca Township in 1832. The names of her parents were John and Elizabeth (Moore) McDowell, natives respectively of Ohio and Tennessee.

John Virgin and his wife had four daughters. Georgie Annie was born in 1866, Minnie Alice in 1868, Alta Zeo in 1870, and Daisy Dean in 1876.

In 1868, he moved to Fairbury and began breeding Percherons, a French draft horse. He was one of the first breeders of Percherons in the United States.

In 1872, John traveled to France and purchased Percherons for shipping to his horse business in Fairbury. He also found a French citizen who would later acquire horses in France and then sell them on consignment to him. John capitalized his horse business using the money he had saved when he was a tenant farmer.

The Fairbury Fair was first organized in 1876 by the Fairbury Union Agricultural Society. John Virgin was its first President and served in that capacity for many years. In 1878, he was appointed Postmaster of Fairbury.

Sadness struck the Virgin family in 1881. Two of John Virgin's daughters contracted diphtheria. One daughter recovered, but the oldest daughter, fifteen-year-old Georgia Annie, died in September. Diphtheria claimed many Fairbury children until a vaccine was developed in 1923.

1888 was a very prosperous time for John Virgin. He was fifty years old in 1888. Since beginning his horse business in 1868, he had shipped between 400 and 500 Percheron horses from France to his Fairbury area customers. His horse sales in 1888 were about \$35,000 annually. This amount of money is equivalent to \$988,000 in today's dollars.

John designed and built a unique stable for his horse business. It was called the Horse Palace and was located on Third Street, just north of where the Walton Centre is now located. The building was of brick and frame construction. It was forty by 200 feet and was built to accommodate fifty head of horses. There was an exercise facility for the horses where their power was used to grind feed for their food. This unique building is depicted in one of the historic murals located in Veterans Memorial Park on Locust Street.

He was one of the charter members of Fairbury Post No. 75, Grand Army of the Republic (G. A. R.), and occupied most of its posts of duty. In 1888, he was the Commander of the Post. He took great pleasure in attending

State Encampments and meeting his old comrades. He and his wife were members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and they contributed liberally to the support and maintenance of that organization.

John Virgin was heavily involved with the Fairbury and the Illinois State Fair. The Governor of Illinois appointed him to help plan the agricultural exhibits at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

In March of 1897, John Virgin and his family moved from Fairbury to Chicago. He accepted the job of the Superintendent of the Garfield park stables for \$100 per month salary. This salary would be equivalent to \$3,500 per month in today's dollars.

Sadness again struck the Virgin family in 1897. Daughter Alta Virgin died at the age of twenty-seven in Chicago. She was buried in Graceland Cemetery.

In November of 1900, John Virgin, age 62, attended the national meeting of the National French Draft Horse Association. John was Vice-President of this organization and was presiding over the meeting at the Sherman Hotel. John started to feel ill, and he was rushed to a back room in the hotel. In a few minutes, he died. While he was absent from the meeting, the members elected him Vice-President for another term.

John Virgin's funeral was one of the largest ever held in Fairbury. His obituary in the Blade was one of the longest ever published by that newspaper. John Virgin was one of the most famous citizens of early Fairbury. He was a Civil War veteran, and he was nationally known for his importation of French draft horses.

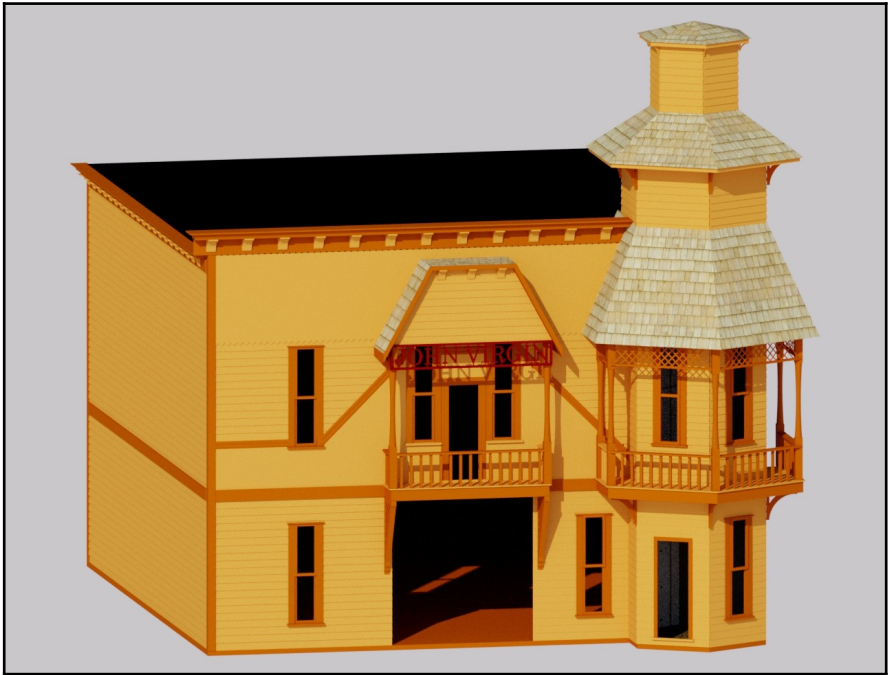


John Virgin



Typical Percheron Horse





John Virgin's Horse Palace redrawn by Dale C. Maley



## **CHAPTER 47**

### **Dr. C. B. Ostrander**

#### **Colorful Early Fairbury Area Doctor**

Chauncey B. Ostrander's parents were Tobias Ostrander and Roxana Fish from Baden, Germany. Their family had two boys and two girls. One of these boys, C.B. Ostrander, was born in 1818 in New York.

When C.B. Ostrander was five years old, the family came to America and located at Poughkeepsie, New York. His mother then died of smallpox when he was nine years old. Just five days later, his father also died from smallpox.

Orphan C.B. Ostrander was taken in by the Troy Conference Methodist Episcopal church. He completed his studies in the common schools. Chauncey then started to study medicine under the instruction of Dr. Daniel Chapman of Lyons, New York. It took him three years and nine months to complete his medical training.

In 1833, he moved to Chicago and started a practice as a physician. After being a physician for four years, he received the appointment of Assistant Surgeon of the 2nd U.S. Infantry. He joined this military regiment in Florida. He practiced medicine in the U.S. Army for four years until 1841. Chauncey returned to Chicago and resumed his private medical practice. In 1846, at the age of twenty-eight, he married Miss Jane E. Holland in Chicago.

In 1850, Mr. and Mrs. Ostrander moved to Pontiac, Illinois. He started a new medical practice in the Pontiac area. Also, in 1850, Congress passed the Scrip Warrant Act of 1850. This new law awarded 160 acres of land to military veterans. Dr. Ostrander applied for 160 acres in Section 35 of Avoca Township. The warrant for this land noted that Dr. Ostrander served as a Private in Captain Kellos's Company, the Eighth Regiment of the United States Infantry.

In 1852, Dr. Ostrander bought forty more acres in Section 18 of Avoca Township. He purchased forty more acres in Section 18 in 1856. He paid \$2.50 per acre for these eighty acres. Section 18 is just west of Lodemia or southwest of McDowell.

In 1859, Dr. C.B. Ostrander was chosen as a director for the Pontiac fair. He gave his mailing address as Hickory Point, Illinois. Postal records indicate there was a post office in Hickory Point between the years of 1856 and 1859. Hickory Creek flows through Section 28 and empties into the Vermilion River in McDowell. It is believed the ghost town of Hickory Point was located southwest of McDowell.

In 1869, the Chicago & Paducah Railroad laid its tracks from Dwight down to Strawn. Lodemia, northwest of Fairbury, was formed as a grain elevator stop on this railroad. Lodemia initially had a grain elevator, a church, and a post office. In 1877, Dr. C.B. Ostrander was appointed the first postmaster of Lodemia.

From 1850 until the 1860s, Dr. Ostrander was the only physician for all of southern Livingston County.

As part of celebrating the nation's Centennial anniversary, the oldest settlers of Livingston County decided they should hold a reunion. Dr. Ostrander was appointed President of the Old Settlers' Association. He helped plan the first Old Settler's Day held in December of 1875. Tables were set up for 1,500 people to attend the first reunion in Pontiac. All of the tables were filled, and the day was spent relating incidents and anecdotes of the early days of Livingston County.

The Doctor was very fond of playing practical jokes upon his friends. He was also known for telling the largest tall tales in this area. After he moved from Pontiac to his farm west of Lodemia, he loved to describe the good qualities and exceptional features of his plantation to his old Chicago friends. He told them his plantation had a pond where he caught barrels and barrels of fine fish in an incredibly short amount of time. His Chicago friends never dreamed this was simply a "fish story." They decided to pay a visit to Ostrander's farm and go fishing in this wonderful pond. They wrote a letter to Ostrander and told him they would be arriving at his farm in a couple of weeks to go fishing.

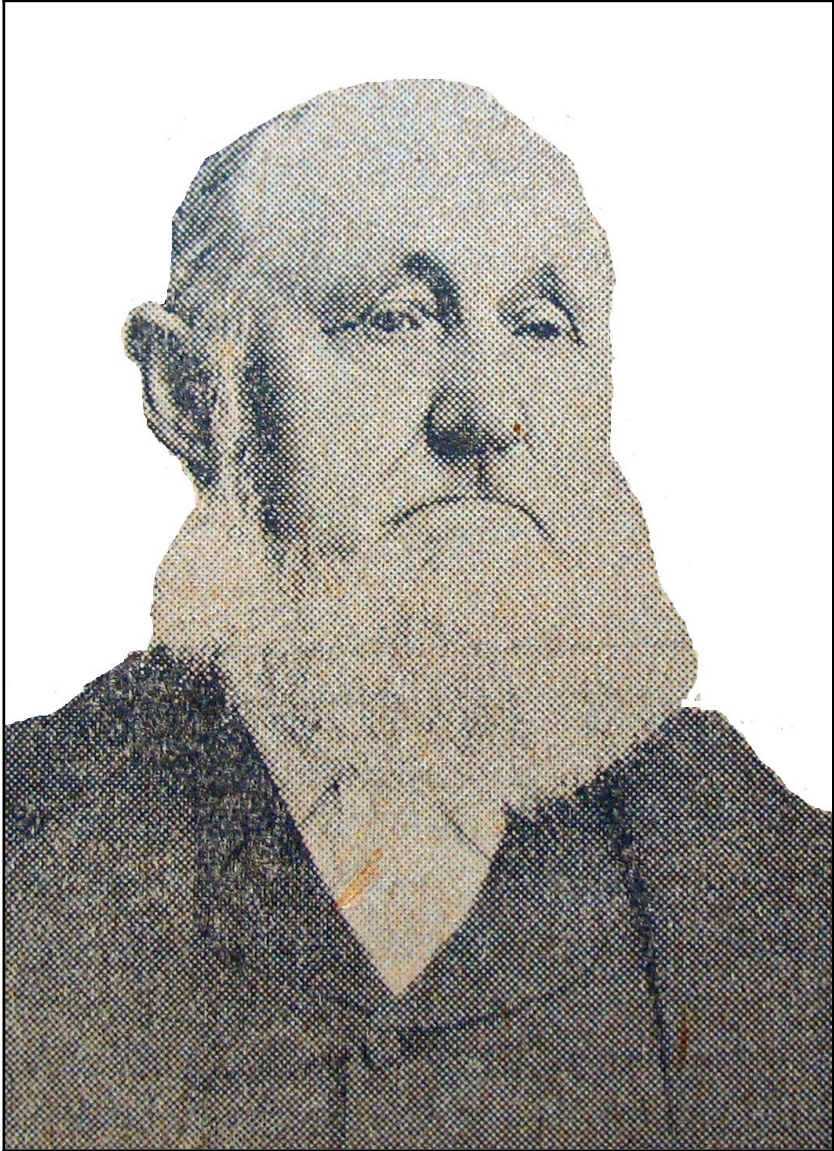
A few weeks later, the Chicago people arrived with fishing tackle of various kinds. They were entertained the first night after they arrived on the farm. The next morning, the visitors asked for directions to the pond. Dr. Ostrander did not hesitate, and he took them to an old well located on the back of the farm. When they were just a short distance from the old well, Dr. Ostrander seemed to be very surprised and stopped the party. He told the Chicago visitors, "Well, gentlemen, this is the place where the pond has been." Ostrander then pointed to the old well and said, "I think the pond must have all leaked down into that hole."

Dr. Ostrander's patients were all farmers with little money. One day, a patron objected to the amount of Dr. Ostrander's bill. The Doctor informed the patient, very confidentially, that if he knew the cost of the medicine he had used in his case, he would not be surprised at his bill being so large. Ostrander told him the medicine he used had a cost of \$2,700 an ounce. It required the services of ten men for four months to gather just one ounce, and nine out of ten men lost their lives while getting the medicine.

Dr. Ostrander and his wife had no children of their own. They had both been orphans when they were children. They decided to give parental care to eight other orphans and raised them to be successful citizens.

Ostrander was also a staunch Abolitionist. One day he came into Fairbury and found a fugitive slave chained to the floor of a two-story building. This fugitive slave was going to be returned to his master in Virginia. Using a crow-bar, sledgehammer, and chisel, the Doctor cut the shackles from the fugitive slave. He loaded the fugitive into a horse-drawn buggy and delivered him to Dr. C. V. Dyer in Chicago. Ostrander also gave the fugitive \$10 in cash. The fugitive was placed on the steamer "Illinois," commanded by Captain Blake. The steamer transported him to freedom in Maiden, Canada.

Dr. C.B Ostrander was one of the most colorful figures in early Fairbury. He was buried in Graceland Cemetery when he died in 1905.



Doctor C.B. Ostrander

## **CHAPTER 48**

### **Dick McAllister**

#### **Richard Alfonse McAllister**

John McAllister was born in County Derry, Ireland, in 1848. County Derry is in the northernmost part of Ireland. John worked in Ireland as a coal miner and brick baker. John had two brothers. His brothers were James McAllister and R. J. McAllister. In 1873, at the age of twenty-five, John McAllister married Catherine McElroy in Ireland. They then moved to Glasgow, Scotland.

John and Catherine McAllister had three children while in Scotland. Agnes C. McAllister was born in 1877 in Glasgow. Their second child was Richard Alfonse McAllister, born in 1879. Their third child was Edward McAllister, born in 1881.

Around 1881, John and Catherine McAllister moved with their three young children from Scotland to Fairbury. John McAllister first took a job making bricks in Fairbury for Jeff Donahue. He then worked as a coal miner in the three coal mines operating in Fairbury at that time. In 1884, John and Catherine McAllister's last child was born. Her name was Jennie McAllister.

The two brothers of John McAllister also emigrated from Ireland to Illinois. James McAllister settled in Peoria. Brother R. J. McAllister made his home in Fairbury.

Just one year after John McAllister's wife Catherine died, he joined with a group of other coal miners and founded a new coal mine in Fairbury. It was the Cooperative Coal Company, and it was opened in 1886. It operated until 1941, and it was located near the entrance to the Timber Ridge Subdivision in Fairbury.

Unfortunately, Catherine McAllister died in 1885 in Fairbury. John McAllister became a single father in charge of raising four children between ages one and eight. Richard A. McAllister was only six years old

when his mother died. Richard completed grades one through seven in the Fairbury schools. When Richard was age thirteen in 1892, he started working in the Fairbury coal mines with his father. R. A. McAllister grew to become a very physically large man in adulthood.

Because of R. A. McAllister's physical stature, he became an outstanding football player. Between about 1900 and 1910, he played the position of tackle on several football-for-pay teams. He played football weekend games in Peru, Chicago, and Peoria. In this era, he was considered one of the best tackles in the State of Illinois.

In 1906, R. A. McAllister married Anna Salmon in Fairbury. She was the daughter of Hugh Salmon and Catherine O'Leary. Her parents were both born in Ireland and had emigrated to Fairbury. Anna was twenty-one years old when she married R. A. McAllister. They had no children.

In 1912, John McAllister married for a second time. At the age of sixty-four, he married Gertrude Isabelle Waldon. She was the fifty-year-old widow of William Robinson. They were married for ten years until she died in 1922. John McAllister died in 1927 at age seventy-nine.

Although R. A. McAllister only finished the seventh grade, he taught himself about sports, politics, and union activities. He taught himself and became an expert in parliamentary procedures. R. A. McAllister used this knowledge to become the Secretary of the United Mine Workers local union office in Fairbury. He always insisted on exactly following the correct parliamentary procedures, often to the chagrin of other union members.

In 1935, at the age of fifty-four, R. A. McAllister was appointed Postmaster of Fairbury. At that time, he lived at 407 Elm Street in Fairbury. The Blade newspaper announced his Postmaster appointment and said his loyal service to the Democratic Party was the main reason for his selection. The Blade recounted that Mr. McAllister had served twenty-one years as the Democratic Committeeman in the First Precinct of Indian Grove Township. He was also the party candidate for state senator in 1932 for the 16th District and was defeated by less than 500 votes. He also had served as clerk of the 1934 Livingston County Board of Review. Mr. McAllister had served as an Alderman for eight years and was a senior

member of the Fairbury City Council. He had also been Secretary for the United Mine Workers of America for twenty-five years.

R. A. McAllister led a colorful life, and he liked to tell tall tales about early Fairbury coal mining. In March of 1952, a reporter for the Blade interviewed R. A. McAllister about Fairbury coal mining. McAllister told the reporter that another coal miner had said to him that Bat Masterson worked briefly in a Fairbury coal mine. The resultant article was titled ***Roots of Fairbury Buried Deeply in Coal Mines*** was the start of the myth that Bat Masterson worked in Fairbury coal mines.

Over the following years, this initial Blade story spread to other newspapers. A postcard was even printed supposedly showing Bat Masterson among some other Fairbury coal miners. Alma Lewis James updated her *Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars* Fairbury history book in 1977 for the second edition. For this second edition, she added a note about Bat Masterson working in the Fairbury coal mines. Although it makes a great tale, two exhaustive investigations have debunked the myth that Bat Masterson ever worked in the Fairbury coal mines.

R. A. McAllister died at age eighty-seven in 1967 in Fairbury. The Editor of the Blade noted that McAllister was a long time colorful, and sometimes controversial figure in Fairbury history. During his lifetime, he started working in the coal mines at age thirteen, played professional football before there was a National Football League, became a Fairbury Alderman, ran for state political office, was appointed Fairbury Postmaster, served as Secretary for the United Mine Workers, and was a coal mine inspector. He accomplished many things with only a seventh-grade education. R. A. McAllister was buried in St. John's Catholic Cemetery north of Fairbury.



Dick McAllister in his football uniform



## **CHAPTER 49**

### **1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck**

#### **Chatsworth Train Wreck Impact on Fairbury**

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to Indiana. This railroad later changed its name to the TP&W Railroad. In the 1880s, the TP&W provided both freight and passenger service. To increase usage of its assets, the TP&W got the idea to offer pleasure excursion trips for passengers. In August of 1887, the railroad advertised a special excursion trip to Niagara Falls. This excursion train would pick up passengers along the TP&W route from Peoria to Indiana, then transport them on a sight-seeing trip to Niagara Falls.

The August 5, 1887, Fairbury Blade noted the special excursion train would leave Peoria at 7:15 PM. The train would pick up Fairbury passengers at 9:15 PM. The cost was \$7.50 for the round-trip journey to Niagara Falls. This ticket cost would be equivalent to \$212 in today's dollars. Berths in sleeping cars would be \$5 for the round-trip. Seats in the "chair-cars" would be \$2.50 for the round-trip. This same issue of the Blade noted that Fairbury had eight doctors, and a ninth doctor was going to move to Fairbury soon.

Today's passenger rail cars are constructed of steel and aluminum. Back in the 1880s, passenger cars were built primarily of wood. Passenger cars made from wood were much less expensive to produce than steel cars in that era. Train bridges were also constructed of wood instead of concrete and steel.

When the special Niagara Falls excursion train arrived in Fairbury at 7:15 PM on August 10, 1887, twenty-six passengers boarded the train. The bulk of the passengers on this train boarded in Peoria. The fact that most passengers were from the Peoria area was as expected since Peoria was the largest city along the TP&W train line. This excursion train utilized two locomotives for pulling the train.

The Niagara Falls bound train then proceeded east to Forrest, and then Chatsworth. The train left Chatsworth and started towards its next stop, Piper City. During the day, the TP&W crew had been working on the train tracks. This work included the burning of weeds. The work crew was instructed to make sure all fires were extinguished at the end of the day.

As this train approached a fourteen-foot long wood bridge east of Chatsworth, the fireman and the engineer of the first locomotive noticed flames on the track. Since there was not enough time to stop the train before the bridge, the fireman jumped from the engine. The engineer decided not to jump from the locomotive. The first locomotive actually made it over the burning bridge before it collapsed. The second locomotive and many subsequent wood passenger cars went off the track and down into the earth below the damaged bridge.

As each wooden passenger car went down into the ditch, it sheared the passenger area entirely off the passenger car in front of it. This phenomenon was called telescoping. There is a photograph showing five of these wooden passenger cars in a stack. Instead of a pile of five passenger cars being fifty feet tall, the stack is less than twenty feet tall. Most of the passengers in these telescoped cars were instantly killed.

Within a few hours, the call went to Fairbury for assistance. This call included the need for as many surgeons as possible. At 2:30 AM, three Fairbury physicians boarded a train heading east to Chatsworth. Also on board were a group of Fairbury citizens and a Blade reporter.

When the Fairbury contingent reached Chatsworth, they were shocked to learn that none of the twenty-three Fairbury citizens had been killed in the wreck. Fairbury doctors Barnes, Brewer, and Payson immediately started helping the only surgeon already attending to the injured. The rest of the Fairbury contingent went to the wreck site to help. Later, another group of Fairbury doctors traveled to Chatsworth to also help. They were doctors Lewis, Ostrander, Wilson, and Headley.

The Blade noted that a total of twenty-six people boarded the train at Fairbury. Twenty-three of these people were Fairbury citizens. None of these twenty-three Fairbury citizens were killed. Most of them suffered minor injuries.

Mr. Edwin F. Adams, of Blackstone, boarded the train at Fairbury. He was an old school friend of the local editor of the Blade. He was on his way to Watertown, N. Y. Mr. Adams wanted to see his father and mother, who had been visiting there for some time. Mr. Adams was killed in the train wreck.

Two men from Ottawa, named Vedder and Foley, boarded the train at Fairbury. They became separated in the wreck. Each telegraphed the friends of the other that he was killed. Imagine their feelings when a few hours after the wreck, they met.

The escape of seven Fairbury people, who were in the forward end of the second coach, was almost miraculous. That end of the coach went down into the ditch. The roof ended up being not more than three feet from the ground. Harry Cook quickly got out of his coach car. He luckily found an ax and chopped away the sash of a window and rescued five of the party. It was an hour and a half before he got Louis Werling and A. C. Bartlett out. Cook was the only man in the party who was able to work. The others were Charles Maunder, James Turner, and George Harris. Louis Zigler, in the same car, managed to get out and also rescued a lady. All of the above were bruised and cut on the feet and legs.

Mrs. F. M. Patton was in another coach and with great difficulty, escaped. She was considerably bruised but helped several ladies around her. All around the people mentioned above were dead bodies and people dying, and how everyone from Fairbury escaped alive is a mystery.

S. D. Murdock and wife, Mrs. Claudon, and Alta Virgin were in sleepers. The sleeper car that Murdock was in did not go down. This car was left standing right at the brink. The sleeper car the two latter were in was not among the ones wrecked.

An Illinois state agency, The Railroad and Warehouse Commission, issued its accident investigation report in December of 1887. They found the local section crew was not responsible for causing the bridge to burn. They concluded the most likely cause was embers or sparks from a freight train that passed over the tracks several hours earlier than the Niagara excursion train. Typical estimates for the train wreck are 625 total passengers, eighty-five killed, and 372 injured. It was one of the worst train wrecks of

that era. The Chatsworth train wreck still ranks as the seventh worst in American railroad history in terms of fatalities. Fairbury was very fortunate that none of its twenty-three citizens were killed on that fatal Niagara Falls excursion trip.



Typical 1880s Wooden Passenger Car



Pile of Telescoped Wooden Passenger Cars Stacked on Top of Each Other



Harper's Weekly Illustration of Helping the Injured



## **CHAPTER 50**

### **George A. Decker**

#### **Fairbury Professional Baseball Player George A. Decker**

George A. Decker was born in 1869 in York County, Pennsylvania. In 1870, his family moved from Pennsylvania to Fairbury. George attended the Fairbury schools. His father was a store clerk and bookkeeper. The Decker's lived in a house on Oak Street.

George A. Decker eventually grew to a height of six-foot, one inch with a weight of 180 pounds. In 1888, at the age of 19, he started playing minor league baseball. He played with various minor league teams for four seasons.

Adrian Constantine Anson (1852–1922), nicknamed "Cap" (for "Captain"), was a Major League Baseball first baseman, club manager, and minority owner. He played a record 27 consecutive seasons. Anson was one of the greatest players of his era and one of the first superstars of the game. Anson spent most of his career with the Chicago Cubs franchise (then known as the "White Stockings" and later the "Colts"). He led the team to six National League pennants in the 1880s. In 1939, Anson was inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame. In 1906, the nickname of the Chicago baseball team was changed from the Colts to the Cubs.

In the latter part of the 1892 season, Cap Anson recruited George A. Decker to join his Chicago Colts professional baseball team. Cap Anson was the club manager, but he still played some innings as their first baseman. George's best position was also as first baseman. Often, George would play other positions on the team when Cap Anson wanted to play in a game. George played first base, second base, shortstop, third base, and the outfield positions.

In 1892, George A. Decker not only made it to the big league in baseball, but he also married Luella May Stafford from Fairbury. They were both 23 years old.

In April of the 1893 baseball season, George was at-bat in Atlanta with one runner already on base. George hit the ball, but it went foul. The runner returned to his previous spot at second base but forgot to touch the bag. On the next pitch, George hit the ball clear out of the Atlanta baseball park, and Atlanta newspaper reporters recounted it was the longest home run ever hit in that park. Unfortunately, the Atlanta team pointed out the runner had forgotten to touch second base, and George's massive home run did not count.

In August of 1893, George and Luella's first child, Harry J. Decker, was born. Unfortunately, this child became sick for several months and died in June of 1894. George and Luella's second child, Lena S. Decker, was born in September of 1894.

The Chicago Colts played an exhibition game in September of 1895 in George's home town of Fairbury. Over 2,000 fans attended this game. There were three Fairbury men on the home team. The rest of the players came from neighboring towns. They played seven innings with the Chicago Colts winning the game with a 27 to 4 score.

In September of 1896, George was playing first base and tried to catch a wild throw from his pitcher. The baseball broke George's arm and badly sprained his wrist. The splints on his bone fracture interfered with his sprained wrist. He was in terrible agony and could not sleep unless he was under the influence of opiates. He returned to Fairbury to recover from this injury.

In July of 1897, George Decker's wife died at the age of twenty-eight in Chicago from peritonitis. Peritonitis is inflammation of the peritoneum. The peritoneum is a silk-like membrane that covers the organs within your abdomen. In this era before antibiotics, this disease was deadly. George was devastated because now he had lost both his infant son and his young wife.

George was involved in a very unusual baseball game in August of 1897. Pitcher Danny Friend of the Cubs pitched a few innings, then showered and put on his street clothes. First base player and team manager Cap Anson was ejected in the eighth inning because he argued the game should be called due to darkness. Left fielder George Decker moved to first base



to replace Cap Anson. Danny Friend, dressed in his street clothes, was named to replace Decker in the left field. Danny donned his Cubs hat, slipped on a bathrobe, and trotted to left field. The Giants manager, Bill Joyce, argued with the umpire that Danny was out of uniform. They argued long enough that the game was called for darkness, giving the Cubs a 10-5 win over Atlanta.

George A. Decker played for the Chicago Colts from 1892 to 1897. After leaving the Colts, he played two more years for the St. Louis Browns, Louisville Colonels, and Washington Senators. In 1899, after seven years in the big league, George's professional baseball career was over.

In August of 1905, George made the national newspapers. He was sent before a California judge to determine if he should be committed to an insane asylum. George made some outrageous statements to the judge and courtroom audience. George said the Emperor of Japan had hired him as a trainer for Japan's 500,000 baseball teams. George said the Emperor was paying him a million billion dollars a year. George offered to buy each person in the audience a diamond and a new \$3,000 automobile.

George told the judge that in a baseball game, he became sun struck and fell on his base. He recounted that then a runner slid into his base, and hit George in the head with his cleats. George told the judge that this accident was the end of his baseball career, but he was feeling fine now. The judge sadly shook his head and ruled that George Decker would be committed to the Patton Insane Asylum in California.

George A. Decker died in 1909 at the age of forty in Compton, California. George A. Decker was at the peak of his life in 1893 when he was twenty-four years old. At that point in his life, George had just made the big league in baseball, had just gotten married, and had a new infant son. Little did he know that his life would disintegrate during his remaining sixteen years. He lost his infant son, lost his young wife, had a baseball career that only lasted seven years, and would spend the last few years of his life in a California insane asylum.



	Reiley	Friend	Griffith	Parker	Ryan	McBride	Flynn	
Truby	Briggs	Decker	Lange	Anson	Donahue	Everett	Terry	McFarlan
			Dahlen		Kittridge			

CHICAGO BASE BALL CLUB, 1896.

## **CHAPTER 51**

### **U.S. Patents**

#### **Fairbury an Inventive Town**

The history of patents goes back to the U.S. Constitution. It notes that Congress shall have the power to promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries. A patent is a form of intellectual property that gives its owner the legal right to exclude others from making, using, selling, and importing an invention for a limited period of years in exchange for publishing an enabling public disclosure of the invention. In general, patented ideas are protected for twenty years in the United States.

The U.S. Patent Office manages patents and has a searchable database on its web site. It is relatively easy to search for patents issued after 1976. It is very challenging to search for patents issued before 1976 using the web site of the U.S. Patent Office.

Fortunately, Google has developed a specialized search engine just for patent searches. It is relatively easy to search for patents issued before 1976 using the Google search engine.

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to Indiana. Since Fairbury's founding, its citizens have been issued 155 patents. On average, about one Fairbury citizen has received one patent per year.

In 1867, Simon Kaufman was the first Fairbury citizen to receive a U.S. Patent. His patent was for an improved scouring and scrubbing machine.

The Kring family was a large family in Fairbury in the late 1800s. They operated a large greenhouse complex. This complex was just west of Prairie Central High School. Edward Kring received two patents related to his greenhouse work. George Washington Kring ran a foundry which was just west of Dave's Supermarket. He was granted two patents related to

cultivators and corn-row check planters. George's shop cast the ornamental doorway columns that are still used today in four stores on Locust Street.

Levi J. Odell was a life-long inventor and manufacturer. He received five patents in Fairbury related to his manufacture of check-row corn planters. He then moved to Wisconsin and patented an early version of a typewriter. Odell sold hundreds of thousands of his typewriters. He ended up moving to California and inventing a woman's shaving razor. He also manufactured the razors and blades in California.

One of the unique patents issued to a Fairbury citizen occurred in 1918. U.S. Patent number 52,334 was granted to Bert Randolph Maxwell, and the title was Design for a Doll. Unfortunately, we do not know what prompted Bert to apply for a patent for this doll design. Bert was born in 1880 in Weston. He worked for many years as a lineman for the Fairbury Telephone Company. Then Bert managed a tavern with Dan Dwyer on Locust and Second Streets. He left for Colorado in 1913 and spent three years in that state. When Bert returned, he moved to Bloomington, where he lived until he died in 1945. At first glance, his doll could be considered ugly. Some observers have noted that Bert was just a man way ahead of his time because his doll looks remarkably similar to the very popular Cabbage Patch Kids introduced in 1983.

A sole inventor must bear all the cost of having his idea patented. The inventor usually hires a lawyer who specializes in intellectual property. Large companies require their employees to give the company ownership of any patents developed while they work for the company. The company pays all the legal fees for filing the patents. The employees often receive patent plaques or a financial bonus for obtaining a new U.S. patent.

One large employer, Caterpillar Inc., has a diesel fuel-injection plant located in Pontiac, Illinois. Two of these employees, Dana Coldren and Dale Maley, lived in Fairbury while they worked at this plant. These two employees have received a total of fifty U.S. patents. These fifty patents represent about one-third of the patents issued to Fairbury citizens.

Norman Rittenhouse was a long-time Fairbury area resident. While living in Fairbury, he received thirteen U.S. patents. All of his patents are related to different types of electrical inventions.

Carl G. Eilers was a native of Fairbury, Illinois. He joined the Zenith Radio Corporation in 1948 after receiving his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Purdue University. Through 1961, Carl worked on the world's first pay television system, Zenith Phonevision, earning patents on subscription TV technologies. He later led Zenith's development effort on stereophonic FM radio broadcasting. The stereo FM standard he co-developed was first adopted by the Federal Communications Commission in 1961 and is still in use today around the world. After his death, Carl was called the "Father of Stereo FM Radio and Stereo Television Sound," for his pioneering work during his 50-year career at Zenith.

While living in Fairbury and working at Zenith, Eilers received five U.S. patents. During his lifetime, he received a total of 21 patents.

Some natives of Fairbury have gone on to accumulate U.S. patents while they lived in other cities. One such native would be Carl Goudy. Both Carl and his younger brother William were early world-class motorcycle racers. They have both been inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame. Younger brother William Goudy was killed in early 1916 when he was doing practice laps in California. Carl's girlfriend, Hazel Dominy Bane, then told Carl that she would not marry him unless he gave up motorcycle racing first. Carl gave up motorcycle racing and married Hazel. They moved to New York, and Carl ended up as President of his own company. He was awarded 15 U.S. patents related to electrical equipment. Both Carl and his wife, Hazel, are buried in the Fairbury Mausoleum.

Until 1880, the U.S. Patent Office required each inventor to submit a working model of his invention. This patent model could be no larger than twelve inches wide, twelve inches deep, and twelve inches tall. After 1880, some of these small models were accidentally destroyed by fires. Eventually, all the patent models were sold to the public. William T. Stackpole, of Fairbury, submitted a patent model in 1874 for his boat dredging apparatus. He had a second identical model made to use as a sales tool for his device. A family in the Fairbury area now owns this latter model. This 145-year-old model is a reminder of the long history of Fairbury citizens in developing unique and creative ideas.

**DESIGN.**

**B. R. MAXWELL.**

**DOLL.**

APPLICATION FILED JAN. 16, 1918.

**52,334.**

Patented Aug. 27, 1918.

*Fig. 1.*

*Fig. 2.*



*Inventor*  
*B. R. Maxwell.*

<b>Inventor</b>	<b>Number of Patents</b>	<b>Years Issued</b>
DANA R. COLDREN	34	1999-2015
DALE C. MALEY	16	1995-2008
NORMAN P. RITTENHOUSE	13	1998-2014
JASPER N. HIERONYMUS	6	1889-1905
CARL G. EILERS	5	1954-1966
LEVI J. ODELL	5	1882-1885
ROBERT E. DANIELS JR.	3	1997-2012
SAMUEL M. BARNES	3	1882-1884
DONALD SLAGEL	2	2004-2016
EDWARD N. KRING	2	1909-1916
GEORGE WASHINGTON KRING	2	1869-1876
JOSEPH BURGER	2	1874
JOSEPH E. MARCEAU	2	1919
OTHELLO J. DIMMICK	2	1880-1882
SIMON KAUFMAN	2	1867-1868
WILLIAM CARPENTER	2	1868
WILLIAM WALKER	2	1916-1921



William Stackpole's Dredging Patent Model



## **CHAPTER 52**

### **Alma Lewis James**

#### **Fairbury's First Historian**

Thomas A. Beach was born in 1828 in Ohio and died in Fairbury in 1911. He married Amelia Bartlett from Ohio. Mr. Beach became a prominent businessman and banker in Fairbury. In today's dollars, his net worth was about \$50 million when he died. Mr. Beach built the "lion house" on East Hickory Street in 1872. Mr. and Mrs. Beach had three children. Sarah Beach died at age fourteen, and Chloe Beach died at age nineteen. Only daughter Ella Beach lived until adulthood.

Ella Beach married Dr. George C. Lewis from Ohio. Dr. Lewis practiced medicine for many years in Fairbury. Dr. Lewis and his wife Ella had one son and two daughters. Son Thomas B. Lewis was born in 1884 and died in 1915. Daughter Amelia Beach Lewis was born in 1886. She married Walter C. Ficklin.

The youngest daughter of Dr. Lewis and his wife Ella was Alma Eloise Lewis. She was born in 1899 in Fairbury. She attended grade school and high school in Fairbury. While she was in high school, she started her fifty-year career in teaching Sunday School at the United Methodist Church in Fairbury.

She graduated from Fairbury Township High School in 1917. She then attended the University of California in Berkley for her first year at college. She then transferred to Northwestern University. She graduated from Northwestern University in 1923. During summer breaks from college, Alma traveled with her parents. Their travels included an ocean voyage to Europe.

Percy C. James Jr. graduated from Fairbury Township High School in 1919. He graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University Law School in 1924. Percy then married Alma Lewis in 1924 in Fairbury. He practiced law for twenty-five years in Fairbury.

Percy and Alma James had four daughters and one son. The daughters were Ella, Olive, Sarah, and Phoebe. Unfortunately, daughter Sarah Beach James died when she was only fifteen months old. Their only son was Percy James III.

Alma Lewis James had a lifelong interest in history. She was one of the charter members of the Livingston County Historical Society. Alma focused her research on Fairbury history from 1857 (when Fairbury was founded) until the year 1900. She thought the advent of the automobile changed life so dramatically after 1900 that she was not interested in studying that era.

Alma also had a lifelong interest in writing. She wrote and published at least seven different books. Her first publication was in 1935 and was titled *The Ancestry of Ella Beach Lewis*. In 1936, she wrote *The Ancestry and Posterity of Obil Beach*.

In 1939, Alma and her family moved into the Thomas A. Beach "Lion House" on east Hickory Street. This house was built by Thomas A. Beach, Alma's grandfather.

In 1951, she wrote *Boney's Hired Man*. In 1952, she wrote *Buckle on the Corn Belt*. This book was a story about early Fairbury history. In 1954, she compiled Nicks from the Blade, a mixture of past Blade newspaper articles and stories passed to her from her mother and other friends.

In 1967, Alma wrote her most famous book, *Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars*. To write this book, she used a lot of the material from her 1952 Buckle on the Corn Belt book. At the beginning of this book, Alma cautioned readers that not all the Fairbury tales were documented facts. She recounted that if the readers wanted absolute facts about Fairbury history, they should consult any of the three histories of Livingston County.

In 1878, 1888, and 1909, extensive and well-documented history books were written about Livingston County and Fairbury. These are the three history books that Alma referred to in her 1967 book.

For the title of her 1967 book about Fairbury history, she chose two things unique to Fairbury history. The McDowell brothers were some of the orniest boys to ever live in Fairbury. They developed a new weapon that could knock a boy or man unconscious. One of these new weapons was captured and put on display at the Blade office. It turned out to be a canvas sack, six inches in diameter and twelve inches long. It was stuffed with excelsior and coarse salt. The stuffed canvas sack was tied to a two-foot-long stick. The McDowell brothers would hold the wood handle, swing the stuffed club, and then strike the victim on the back of the head. They often used it on visitors to the town. They also used the stuffed club on Pontiac boys that were trying to date Fairbury girls. The introduction of a hefty fine for possessing a stuffed club ended the use of that weapon.

Back in the 1880s, many Fairbury men used bear grease on their hair. When they sat down in the wife's beautiful chair, the back of their head would deposit bear grease onto the chair. To protect their valuable chairs, the wife would place a piece of cloth put over the back of a chair to protect it from the grease. This cloth could be easily washed. This protective cloth is called an antimacassar.

Alma had to perform a lot of historical research in the 1950s and 1960s to write her most famous book, *Stuffed Clubs & Antimaccassars*. There were no computers available in that era to perform this type of research. Alma is to be commended for dedicating the extraordinary time and patience required to create this book documenting Fairbury's early history.

In 1977, Alma released the second edition of *Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars*. The second edition is similar to the first edition, with one exception. In the first edition, she dedicated a whole chapter to William T. Stackpole. He was one of Fairbury's most interesting early citizens. For unknown reasons, she eliminated the Stackpole chapter in the second edition. Alma only mentions Stackpole briefly in the second edition.

The Dominy Memorial Library has copies of *Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars*. New copies of the second edition of *Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars* can be purchased from the Fairbury Echoes Museum. This book is an entertaining read and provides a glimpse into what life was really like in early Fairbury.



Alma Lewis James

## **CHAPTER 53**

### **Fairbury Hospitals**

#### **History of Fairbury's Hospitals**

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. The population of Fairbury in 1860 was 262 residents. By the year 1900, Fairbury's population had grown from only 262 up to 2,187 citizens. During this era, Fairbury often had about six medical doctors serving the community. There were no hospitals nearby, and the doctors all made house calls. Patients were typically treated in their homes. The first hospital in the Fairbury area was the St. James Hospital in Pontiac, Illinois. It was first established in 1907.

In 1909, two young women attended nursing school at the Hinsdale, Illinois, Sanitarium Training School. One of these young women was Rachel Olson. She was born in 1879 in Chicago. The other young woman was Anna Martha Gadeken. She was born in Germany in 1886. She married William Vetter in Nebraska at age seventeen in 1903. Rachel and Martha graduated from the Hinsdale nursing school in May of 1909.

In 1911, these two young women established the first hospital in Fairbury. Rachel Olson was thirty-two years old, and Mrs. Vetter was twenty-five years old. They created this first hospital in the second story of the Archer House on Locust Street. The Archer House is several buildings to the west of the Walton Centre.

After a short while, they moved the hospital to a house located at the northwest corner of First and Oak Streets. They then moved the hospital again to 313 West Oak Street. On this site was the John Monroe cement block house located at the southeast corner of Oak and Webster streets.

In August of 1912, the editor of the Lake Union Herald medical magazine paid a visit to the Fairbury hospital. The editor reported that Miss Rebecca Olson assisted Mrs. Martha Vetter in a house sufficiently large enough to accommodate four or five patients. They had one room fitted up for operating, and one of the resident physicians brought his surgical patients

to their little institution. The editor said the hospital offered electric light baths, massage, galvanic and sinusoidal electricity, and high-frequency treatments. The editor said the new hospital was having excellent success.

In 1913, "Martha" Gadeken married Charlotte farmer William Henry Hoppe Jr. in Fairbury. They had four children. In 1930, they moved to Nebraska. In 1933, at the age of forty-six, Martha experienced gall stone problems, and she died in Nebraska. Rachel Olson continued to work at the various Fairbury hospital locations. She died in Fairbury in 1970.

The hospital in the house located at 313 West Oak Street became a community project. Without any persuasion, local citizens banded together and gave freely of their time and talents to remodel the residence. At that time, the public felt that the hospital was their responsibility. They felt it was there to serve their needs and that they must help to make it a good hospital. Local carpenters donated labor and tools and began remodeling the inside. Local decorators painted walls, refinished woodwork, and polished floors. On February 2, 1914, the new hospital was formally opened to the public. The hospital at this location served the Fairbury area for fourteen years until 1928.

In 1928, local community leaders decided that Fairbury needed a larger hospital. On January 29, 1928, the Hospital Board bought a large house on South Fifth Street from the estate of Frieda Munz Scharlach for \$6,155. This home was one of the oldest in Fairbury and was built by J. J. Taylor in 1868.

Again, local volunteers helped to remodel this large rambling house into a hospital. The American Legion was very generous in contributing to the new hospital. The volunteers converted the residence into a ten-bed hospital with a large kitchen, a nursery, a dumb-waiter, elevator, and a reception office. They made an addition to the house, which gave the hospital an operating room. On August 17, 1929, the public was invited to view the new hospital. Fairbury residents were pleased with the accomplishments.

On October 1, 1941, the ground was broken for a new obstetrical unit. A year and a half later, on February 13, 1943, the modern brick obstetrical unit was opened for public inspection. The maternity wing could handle

eleven mothers at one time. This wing had twelve bassinets and one incubator for premature babies. A walkway was constructed to connect the house to the new brick obstetrical unit.

The second phase of expanding the hospital was the second wing addition. The ground was broken for the second wing on August 9, 1950. The last stage of the hospital expansion plan was completed by May of 1952. A grand opening ceremony for the completed hospital was held on November 21, 1953. Shortly after the grand opening, the kitchen area was expanded to handle the increased number of patients.

The total cost of the three phases of hospital construction in 1953 was \$336,000. This expenditure would be equivalent to \$3.2 million in today's dollars. The new hospital had a capacity of ninety-two beds.

In 1964, the Helen Lewis Smith pavilion was added onto the north end of the hospital. Its twenty-three patient capacity brought the total size of the hospital up to 115 beds. The maximum employment level for the hospital and the pavilion was about 135 people.

By 1990, there were not enough new babies being born at the Fairbury Hospital to justify keeping the obstetrics unit open. It closed in March of 1990.

Many different factors caused the number of patients at the Fairbury Hospital to decline in the early 1990s. The number of days of hospitalization required for various procedures was dramatically reduced. Specialty outpatient services were available in Pontiac, Bloomington, Champaign, and Peoria. Patients who required medical services sought out larger hospitals. These larger hospitals had better facilities and more experience handling different types of procedures.

The Hospital Board tried to cope with the massive decline in the number of patients at the Fairbury Hospital. Proposals were sought and received from at least three different medical organizations. None of these proposals solved the problem of not enough patients. In 1994, in-patient services were stopped. In January of 1995, no more emergency room patients were admitted. Sadly, after eighty-four years of having a hospital

within the city, Fairbury now had to rely on hospital services from Pontiac, Bloomington, Peoria, and Champaign.



Class of 1909 from Hinsdale Nursing School

Rachel Olson      Mary Strouf      Annalee Aikman      Eva Borden  
Dagmar Petersen      Martha Vetter

Rachel Olson and Martha Vetter started the first hospital in Fairbury. Rachel Olson went on to work at all five locations of the Fairbury hospitals.





Taylor home on south Fifth Street that was converted to a hospital in 1929

*We Welcome You . . .*



*Open House*

November 21 and 22, 1953

1 P. M.—5 P. M. and 7 P. M.—9 P. M.



*The Fairbury Hospital*

A COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

FAIRBURY, ILLINOIS

## **CHAPTER 54**

### **Knights of Pythias**

#### **The Secret Society of the Fairbury Knights of Pythias**

Pythias was a close friend of Damon around the year 400 BC. Both Pythias and Damon were followers of the philosopher Pythagoras. They traveled to Syracuse during the reign of the tyrannical King Dionysius. After arriving in Syracuse, King Dionysius accused Pythias of plotting against him, and he sentenced him to death.

Accepting his death sentence, Pythias asked to be allowed to return home one last time to settle his affairs and bid his family farewell. Not wanting to be taken for a fool, the King refused the request of Pythias. The tyrant believed that if he released Pythias, he would flee and never return.

As an alternative solution, Damon offered himself as a hostage in Pythias' absence. The King agreed to this proposal but ruled that if Pythias did not return by the appointed time, Damon would be executed instead of Pythias.

King Dionysius was convinced that Pythias would never return. As the day Pythias promised to return came and went, he called for Damon's execution—but just as the executioner was about to kill Damon, Pythias returned.

Apologizing to his friend for the delay, Pythias explained that on the passage back to Syracuse, pirates had captured his ship and thrown him overboard. Pythias swam to shore and made his way back to Syracuse as quickly as possible. He arrived just in time to save his friend. Dionysius was astonished and pleased by the friendship exhibited by Pythias and Damon. The King pardoned both men. King Dionysius then asked to become their third friend. Both Pythias and Damon denied the King's request.

In 1821, the Irish poet John Banim wrote a play based on the legend of Pythias and Damon. Justus H. Rathbone was so moved from watching this

play that he founded the fraternal order Knights of Pythias in 1864 in Washington, D.C. The Knights of Pythias is the first fraternal organization to receive a charter under an act of the United States Congress. This legend illustrates the ideals of loyalty, honor, and friendship that are the center of this fraternal order.

The Knights of Pythias quickly spread across the United States. In May of 1873, The Fairbury St. Bernard Lodge number 29 was created. The charter members were W. C. Baskin, T. L. Hunt, A. F. Kilbury, H. W. Weaver, Jos. C. Ross, Isaac Kerr, J. E. Bliss, Fred Rettenmayer, B. E. Robinson, O. P. Ross, R. M. Robinson, H. L. Marsh, and J. W. Ramsey.

Of these 13 charter members, Henry L. Marsh was probably the most prominent of that group. John and his son Henry L. Marsh were the first to discover coal in Central Illinois in 1862 one mile west of Fairbury. They also established the Marsh Addition to Fairbury and donated Marsh Park to the City.

Shelby Moore Cullom was elected Governor of the State of Illinois in 1876. He was a popular governor and was re-elected to a second term in 1880. In 1882, Governor Cullom ran for the U.S. Senate and won. When Shelby Cullom resigned as Illinois Governor in late 1882, Lieutenant Governor John Marshall Hamilton became the Governor of Illinois. The Fairbury Knights of Pythias were able to invite Governor Hamilton to attend a fund-raising dance in 1883 at their lodge in Fairbury. It was one of the best-attended balls ever held in Fairbury.

In the 1880s, the railroads found themselves with miles of track and many locomotives that were only used to haul freight occasionally. To improve their profits, the railroads decided to offer low-cost passenger excursion trips. In 1884, the Fairbury Knights of Pythias worked with the C&A Railroad to provide an excursion trip from Chicago to New Orleans. Tickets could be purchased from Sam Greenbaum, a member of the Fairbury Knights of Pythias. Fortunately, this train excursion trip occurred with no travel problems.

Just three years later, in 1887, the TP&W railroad sponsored an excursion trip from Peoria to Niagara Falls. This excursion train derailed just east of Chatsworth because of a burned-out bridge, killing 85 passengers and

injuring another 372 people. This tragedy became known as the Chatsworth Train Wreck. Miraculously, all 23 Fairbury citizens that boarded this excursion train escaped with no serious injuries or fatalities.

In 1888, the Knights of Pythias held a national convention in Cincinnati, Ohio. The TP&W railroad office in Fairbury sold round trip tickets for \$6.50 to allow Fairbury members to attend the national meeting. This ticket cost would be equivalent to \$183 in today's dollars. The officers of the Fairbury Knights of Pythias that year were J. T. Clemens, C. W. Keck, Fred Baird, S. E. Ellis, W. H. Karnes, G. W. Bennett, N. E. Fulton, J. R. Smith, and E. Williams.

The membership in the Fairbury Knights of Pythias secret society peaked in 1898 at 100 members.

In July of 1908, the St. Bernard Lodge Number 29 of the Knights of Pythias disbanded. The club returned its charter to the Grand Lodge. Only one of the charter members retained his membership until the charter was given up. This member was J. W. Ramsey, who had moved to Lafayette, Louisiana. Nine of the original thirteen charter members had passed away by 1908.

Due to declining membership, this secret society could no longer raise enough money to keep up their lodge, pay their rent, and pay benefits to sick members. During its 35 year-long history, the Knights of Pythias raised several thousand dollars above its annual expenditures. These excess funds were used to accomplish much good in the Fairbury area.

◀FRIENDSHIP, CHARITY, BENEVOLENCE. KNIGHTS OF PYTHIAS. FOUNDED FEBRUARY 19TH, 1864.▶

The Order is founded upon naught but the purest and sincerest motives. Its aim is to alleviate the suffering of a brother, succor the unfortunate, zealously watch at the bedside of the sick, soothe the pillow of the dying, perform the last sad rites at the grave of a brother; offering consolation to the afflicted, and caring, with all a brother's love, for the widow and orphan.

BROTHERLY LOVE AND CHARITY are the Pillars on which it rests; Friendship and Truth the bond and surety of its preservation. PEACE ON EARTH AND GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN.

# K<sup>O</sup>F P. RECORD



## **CHAPTER 55**

### **Post Office History**

#### **Fairbury Post Office History**

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to Indiana. When a new town is established, a request is made to the federal government to create a post office. When Fairbury's request was made for a new post office, something went wrong with the paperwork. The new post office was named Fairburg, not the intended Fairbury. In the 1859 Official Register of the United States book, Fairburg was the name of the post office, and the postmaster was H. H. McKee. He was paid an annual salary of \$89.64. This salary would be equivalent to \$2,531 in today's dollars.

Some old postcards exist showing Fairburg as the village name. Some Civil War veterans listed their mailing addresses as Fairburg also. At some point, the post office name got corrected to Fairbury, Illinois.

The first known location of the Fairbury post office was in 1887 when it was located in the south or rear part of the McDowell bank building. This building is at the southwest corner of Locust and Third Streets and is now home to the Burgers & Beer restaurant.

The post office moved from the south part to the north part of this same building. This move was prompted by the McDowell's First National Bank ceasing operations in the front of the building. Old photographs exist which show the post office sign in the south and north ends of this building.

The post office stayed in the north end of this building for thirty-nine years. In 1926, The Blade newspaper purchased this building. The post office then moved into the southeast corner of the Duell building located at the northwest corner of Third and Walnut streets. The post office was located about where the front service desk of Dave's Supermarket is now located.

The Duell building was initially split into many different businesses with the storefronts along Third Street. Through the years, Dave's Supermarket gradually kept expanding until it occupied the entire Duell building.

In 1937, a new post office building was approved by Congress as one of 300 public buildings in a \$70 million emergency construction fund. Fairbury's new post office was estimated to cost \$70,000. This price would be equivalent to \$1.24 million in today's dollars.

Five different sites were studied for the new post office location. Before a final place could be selected and construction started, Fairbury's new post office was put on indefinite hold due to escalating World War II conflicts. Seven other new post offices in Illinois were also put on hold.

With the new post office on hold, in 1947, the post office moved to its fourth location at the northeast corner of Locust and Second Streets. At the time of the move, this building was known as the Porter Building. Today, Andy's Deconstruction & Recycling company occupies this building. In 2016, The Fairbury Improvement Group repainted the Occident Flour sign on the west side of this building.

World War II ended in 1945. In 1949, a new Fairbury post office was re-authorized by Congress. It took ten more years to complete site selection and build the new post office at the southwest corner of Locust and Fourth Streets. The post office moved into this new building in July of 1959.

In July of 2007, an act of Congress officially named the Fairbury post office in honor of Dr. Francis E. Townsend. Townsend was born in a log cabin on a farm northeast of Fairbury in 1867. When he was eighteen, he set out to find a new life and worked at a great variety of jobs. Townsend finally settled on becoming a medical doctor when he was thirty-one years old. He eventually moved to California.

While living in California, Townsend was appalled to see starving older women scavenging through trash cans looking for food. As a result, he came up with the idea of a public pension plan for senior citizens. He proposed paying every person over age sixty a pension of \$45,000 in today's dollars. Townsend also advocated paying for this public pension by



increasing taxes. His tax proposal ideas ranged from a two percent tax on all transactions, a three percent income tax, or a national sales tax.

Since the country was in the middle of the Great Depression of the 1930s, a public pension was a tremendously popular idea for senior citizens. Townsend traveled the country promoting his old-age pension plan. The first Townsend Club was formed in California in 1934. Just a year later, there were over 4,500 clubs across the nation. Townsend's massive political movement put heavy political pressure on President Roosevelt to adopt a similar pension plan.

Roosevelt then started to support an old-age pension plan. The plan adopted in 1935 is the Social Security system we still have today. Instead of Townsend's proposed pension of \$45,000 at age sixty, the current system pays out an average of \$16,400 to those over age sixty-five. Initially, the Social Security system was funded by a two percent income tax. Today the employee and employer pay a total of 15.34% of earnings.

Townsend returned to Fairbury nine times from 1939 to 1947. The city celebrated this native son's return with events called Townsend Homecomings. Townsend died in 1960. He is often called the father of the Social Security System. When you enter the Fairbury post office, look to your right, and you will see the Francis Townsend plaque. One of the five historic murals in Veteran's Memorial Park is also dedicated to Francis Townsend.



## **CHAPTER 56**

### **1849 California Gold Rush**

#### **William T. Stackpole Strikes it Rich in the 1849 Gold Rush**

One of Fairbury's most colorful characters was William T. Stackpole. He lived from 1827 to 1894. He was one of Fairbury's earliest citizens. During his life, William was a gold prospector, pioneer, farmer, merchant, grain speculator, oil field worker, real estate salesperson, inventor, writer, publisher, and visionary.

The Stackpole family moved from Maine to Pekin, Illinois, when William was five years old. William then caught the "gold bug" when gold was discovered in 1848 in California. He went to California and struck it rich as a gold prospector. When William returned to Illinois, he became one of the pioneering farmers of Anchor, Illinois. William then moved to Fairbury shortly after the village was founded in 1857. He lived the rest of his life in Fairbury and died in 1894. William was buried in Graceland Cemetery. His home near the southeast corner of Marsh Park still stands.

William kept a diary of his gold mining trip to California. It is unknown how this 170-year-old diary found its way to the Yale University Beinecke research library on the East coast. The library noted his journal was preserved because it is the only written reference in the world about the different route Stackpole and his party took to the California goldfields.

The library copied the entire 160 pages of the diary for only \$32. With the assistance of retired school-teacher Judith Wells, the old longhand written diary was transcribed into modern text. Stackpole wrote in his journal using a steel point dip pen.

The 21-year-old William Stackpole and about twenty-five other men from Tazewell county left on April 4, 1849, for California. They had twelve wagons pulled by oxen. They used oxen because they were less selective on what food they ate compared to horses. They also took along some cattle and horses.

William's party only averaged about sixteen miles a day of travel. Since the journey from Pekin to northern California was about 2,000 miles, it took them about 125 days to make this trip.

Within just a couple of weeks of leaving Pekin, William's brother became homesick for his wife and young infant daughter. His brother decided to return home to Pekin.

One of their first interesting experiences was in Gallatin, Missouri. One of the local Gallatin residents told William they had some big problems with the Mormons. This resident recounted to Stackpole that many Mormons were killed. The resident reported that the bodies of the dead Mormons were dropped down into a nearby city well.

The Mormons initially settled in Gallatin, Missouri. When they encountered problems in Gallatin, they moved back east across the Mississippi River to Nauvoo, Illinois. When they ran into issues at Nauvoo, they then settled in Salt Lake City, Utah.

When Stackpole and his group got close to St. Joseph, Missouri, he stopped and counted 1,000 wagons waiting to cross the Missouri River on a ferry. On another occasion, two brothers went out to cut whipstocks about a mile above town. The two brothers got separated in the bushes. One of the brothers returned to town and went to sleep. After a few hours of sleep, the brother became worried and went out searching for his lost brother. He found his brother close to death. A desperado had stabbed and beaten his brother while robbing him of \$50.

Near Fort Laramie in Wyoming, Stackpole's group encountered a very unusual natural phenomenon. In a slough area, they found ice several inches thick in the summertime. His men chipped away some of the ice and celebrated with an ice punch drink on that hot summer day. This unusual ice condition no longer exists because the waterways were modified after Stackpole and his crew visited that area.

On his long journey, Stackpole faced death almost every day. There were wagon accidents crossing streams and rivers. There were also drownings and accidental shootings.

It seemed to Stackpole that cholera could kill you in less than 48 hours. They found dead animals along the road, some from drinking from alkali water. There were also many graves along the trail as well. Stackpole faced so much death that he took the time to write a poem about death. He included the poem in his diary.

Stackpole finally made it to a goldfield in northern California. He found gold at Snake Bar, about 120 miles north of Sutter's Creek. William struck it rich in about one year. He made between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in today's dollars. He then got very sick and decided to head back to Tazewell County.

He and two of his fellow miners left their mining site at Snake Bar. On the way to San Francisco, one of William's friends died of sickness. William and his remaining miner friend boarded a sailing vessel to Nicaragua. During the voyage, William's friend also died of a disease.

When William reached Nicaragua, he walked to a lake and took a steamboat across the water. Stackpole then walked to the Gulf of Mexico and boarded a sailing vessel back to Peoria.

The Panama Canal was not opened until 1914. Before the opening of the Panama Canal, many people crossed from one ocean to another through Nicaragua. On his journey through Nicaragua in 1850, Stackpole got to see some massive active volcanoes. They went through six different towns in Nicaragua. Stackpole was very nervous about the possibility of the native guides stealing the gold he had on his pack mules. He did arrive safely back to Peoria with his gold.

Stackpole used his new wealth to buy land in Anchor. Because of adverse economic conditions, he lost this land. He then moved to the newly created city of Fairbury in 1857 and started his long career as a real estate salesperson.

During his lifetime, William T. Stackpole made and lost three different fortunes. He ended up dying penniless in Fairbury. Mr. Stackpole, his wife, and his daughter are buried in unmarked graves in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery.



Commemorative Stamp

## **CHAPTER 57**

### **Mausoleum**

#### **Fairbury Mausoleum**

A mausoleum is an external free-standing building constructed as a monument enclosing the burial chamber of a deceased person or people. The word mausoleum is derived from King Mausolus. He lived in modern-day Turkey and died in 353 B.C. His massive tomb was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Around 1910, a group of Fairbury citizens decided that Fairbury should have a mausoleum in Graceland Cemetery. They researched different mausoleum companies and selected a Chicago firm. This Chicago firm was in the process of designing and building the beautiful Rosehill Mausoleum in Chicago. This Chicago mausoleum was dedicated in 1914 and included stained glass windows by Louis Comfort Tiffany. John G. Shedd, President of Marshall Field & Company, is interred in this mausoleum. John G. Shedd often visited his brother and parents in Fairbury.

The Chicago firm scaled down the size of the Rosehill Mausoleum to fit Fairbury's needs. In September of 1912, a representative from the Chicago firm placed two advertisements in the Blade for the new Fairbury mausoleum. The first ad included an artist's concept illustration of the new Fairbury mausoleum. Mr. M. C. Gray sold crypts in the new mausoleum from the Illinois Hotel. The new Fairbury City Hall building is now located where the Illinois Hotel used to be.

Back in this era, the dead were often buried in simple wood coffins. Over time, the wood deteriorated in the ground, and the coffin eventually collapsed. This first Blade sales article was designed to reduce the natural fears that people had about being buried in the soil. The ad stated that the deceased loved ones would be interred in a dry environment, protected from the elements. A new patented embalming technique was also promised, which would preserve the human body long after death.

The second advertisement published in the September 20, 1912, Blade focused on the durability of the design of the new mausoleum. The mausoleum company stated they had built mausoleums in the Illinois cities of Springfield, Aurora, Kankakee, Galesburg, Decatur, Rockford, Maroa, El Paso, and Ottawa. The article pointed out that most of these new mausoleums were constructed of concrete blocks. The new Fairbury mausoleum would be far superior to any yet erected in Illinois in the way of solid construction. It was to be built with expanded metal, reinforced concrete, and an exterior wall of Bedford stone. The interior of the building was to be solid concrete, lined throughout with Italian marble and covered with a concrete roof and reinforced with steel beams. The interior floor would be covered with glazed tiles. Engineers and architects reported that these buildings should last for the ages.

The Chicago mausoleum company did not want to start the actual construction of the new mausoleum until they had sold enough crypts to break-even on the project. Nineteen months after the initial 1912 ads in the Blade, the mausoleum company ran another Blade ad saying it was the last call to buy crypts in the new mausoleum.

Construction of the new Fairbury mausoleum started in late 1914. The marble arrived for the new building in late January of 1915. The February 1915 Blade announced the new mausoleum was completed except for the unique \$1,000 brass doors. The cost of these unique doors would be equivalent to \$25,704 in today's dollars.

The Blade published a detailed description of the design features of the new mausoleum. The outside measurements of the building are eighty-one feet long, thirty feet wide, and eighteen feet high. The outside of the mausoleum is finished in Blue Bedford stone. The roof is composed of six inches of concrete, four layers of tar, and tarred felt. On top of this is a layer of vitrified promenade tile. The tile seams are poured with tar; on top of this is another coat of tar.

The interior of the building is finished in Alabama marble, with a mosaic tile floor. There are 152 crypts in the mausoleum. One hundred twelve of these crypts are in the north and south corridors. The remainder of the crypts are in the chapel walls. The public receiving vault is on the right just as you enter the mausoleum, and just across from this is the private



vault of Herbert Powell and W.R. Bane. The chapel is eighteen by thirty feet and is situated in the center of the building.

The Blade article recounted that the building was so constructed that it would stand for all time to come. The inside or middle wall was of concrete with reinforced steel rods meshed every eighteen inches. The floor was also of reinforced concrete. There is nothing used in the building that will not stand the wear of ages. While it is built to stand the test of time, it is also a beautiful structure both on the inside and outside. The building is something of which few cities of this size can boast.

The Fairbury Mausoleum Associate was set-up to manage the mausoleum. In 1946, the Board of Directors included President C. W. Veatch, Vice-President Kate Huntoon, Secretary Ruth Taylor, and Treasurer Frances Lindsay.

In 2010, a columbarium was constructed just outside the central mausoleum. It was erected by Pontiac Granite and is five feet high, eleven feet wide, and five feet deep. It is made of solid granite with the outside being polished grey and the inside polished rose. The columbarium has double niches for the interment of cremated remains.

As part of its mission to preserve the local history, the Fairbury Echoes Museum has assembled a binder of obituaries. The binder contains obituaries for over 100 of the people who are interred in the mausoleum. Some of the well-represented families include the Banes, the Claudons, the Danforths, the Duells, the Kelleys, the Lindsays, the Mapels, the Mortons, the Powells, and the Smiths. Unfortunately, the obituaries of another twenty-nine people interred in the mausoleum have not been found at this time.

The most nationally famous person buried in the mausoleum is Carl Goudy. Carl raced Excelsior motorcycles between 1911 and 1915. He was inducted into the Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1998. Carl was interred in the mausoleum in 1964. His wife, Hazel Dominy Bane, was interred in the mausoleum in 1981.

The Fairbury mausoleum is still a beautiful facility, and it is usually open on Memorial Day each year.



## **CHAPTER 58**

### **Ghost Towns**

#### **Fairbury Area Ghost Towns**

The oldest ghost town in the Fairbury area is the village of Avoca. The McDowell family arrived north of Fairbury in 1832. The Village of Avoca was laid out in 1854 by Judge W.G. McDowell, who owned the land on which it was located. It was surveyed by Amos Edwards, then county surveyor. The first store was opened just before it was laid out as a village, and for several years it was a flourishing business place. The first post office was established in 1840.

In addition to the village of Avoca, there was also a church and a cemetery. An extremely rare 1911 map shows that Avoca had forty-eight residential building lots. There was also a public square. The streets were named Bluff, Clark, State, and Main Streets.

The early settlers likely picked this location for their village because it was on Indian Creek and less than one mile from the Vermilion River. The first ferry was over the Vermilion River. It was a raft made of red elm logs. When the river was too high to ford, they put their wagons and freight on the ferry. Their horses had to swim across.

One winter day, a man was in a hurry to cross the frozen river. His plan was to use the ice chunks on the river. He put his horses on the giant cake of ice, but the cake broke in two after the horses got on it. The horse's forefeet were on one piece of ice, and the hind feet were on another piece of ice. He finally got the horses on one piece of ice and paddled it over. He put the wagon on another piece of ice and got it over also, and then went on his way!

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its new tracks from Peoria to Indiana. The establishment of Fairbury was a death knell for the village of Avoca. Many of the houses in Avoca were moved to Fairbury and still stand today. The last funeral in Avoca church was in 1926. The last church was torn down in 1935, and the lumber was

used at the Methodist camp in Lake Bloomington. The only thing left is Avoca Cemetery, and the township is still named Avoca.

Champlin is another ghost town northwest of Fairbury. There used to be a railroad from Fairbury to Pontiac called the Chicago & Paducah railroad. Moses Champlin moved from New York to a farm about 3 miles northwest of Fairbury in 1860. His wife was Tirzah Stanley of New York. They had six children. He was 51 years old when he arrived in Fairbury. His farm of 320 acres was next to the railroad tracks.

He built a grain elevator next to the tracks. The elevator was known as the Champlin train stop. We don't know if Moses had long-term ambitions to make a town around his elevator. The old Champlin grain elevator survived until the summer of 2016. The old elevator was carefully torn down, and the wood is being recycled for other uses.

Another ghost town northwest of Fairbury was Lodemia. It was between Fairbury and Pontiac on the old Chicago and Paducah railroad line. One of the early settlers in Lodemia was John Edward Bodley, Sr. from Fountain County, Indiana. He donated land for a church. At one time, Lodemia had a postmaster, a church, a country school, a Township Hall, and a grain elevator.

Eventually, all the buildings burned down. The grain elevator was raised, and a house sets on its foundation. There is no significant trace left of Lodemia.

A ghost town south of Fairbury was Potosi. Dr. Abraham Green started this village. In the Civil War, he enlisted in Company F, 136th Illinois Volunteer Infantry. After the war, he attended Rush Medical College in Chicago in 1865 and 1866.

There were about four houses, a country school, a post office in a home, and a blacksmith shop in Potosi. The post office was established in 1868 with David S. Crum as the postmaster. The wife of David Crum was Mary Ann Walton. She was the sister of Isaac Walton, the Fairbury department store owner. In 1880, the blacksmith shop was moved to Cropsey, and Dr. Green moved his store to Colfax. On March 27, 1880, the post office was discontinued.

The only remnant of Potosi's existence is a historical marker on First Street south of Fairbury. This marker gives a brief description of the village of Potosi. The Cropsey Woman's Club provided the historical marker in 1976.

The last Fairbury area ghost town was also south of Fairbury. It was named Rosealthe or Rosalthe. It was a small village on the east side of Section thirteen in the Southeast corner of Belle Prairie township. It was initially called Alsop.

Daniel B. Stewart, the founder of Anchor, was responsible for establishing a trading center there. Mr. Stewart, who owned many acres of land in Anchor Township, was one of the leaders in the movement to get the Clinton, Bloomington, and Northeast railroad extended from the northwest into Fayette, Cropsey, Anchor, and Martin townships.

Mr. Cook stated that Rosealthe was located on low ground, and that mud and water were problems. An 1881 report in the Cropsey news noted that D. B. Stewart gave a ball in the city hall to try to encourage people to move to his village.

Stephen Herr, who lived across the road from Rosealthe, in Section eighteen, Fayette, township, was appointed postmaster on March 25, 1881. In 1881, the Cropsey news noted that a new tavern was opened in Rosealthe. This tavern was a last-ditch effort to attract people to live in the village.

Mr. Stewart was unsuccessful in encouraging people to move to his village. In January 1886, the Rosealthe depot was moved to Cropsey and was then used as a section house. The post office at Rosealthe was discontinued on March 3, 1886. No trace of this ghost town exists today.

## SITE OF VILLAGE OF POTOSI

ESTABLISHED 1866 BY DR. H.W. GREEN, PREACHER,  
PHYSICIAN, DRUGGIST, POSTMASTER, AND MANAGER  
OF THE GENERAL STORE. THE VILLAGE CONSISTED  
OF A ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE, BLACKSMITH SHOP,  
SHOE STORE, GENERAL STORE AND RESIDENCES.

THE NORTH AND SOUTH ROAD WAS THE MAIN  
MAIL ROUTE TRI-WEEKLY BETWEEN FAIRBURY AND  
SAYBROOK. THIS ROAD WAS IMPORTANT IN THE  
SETTLEMENT OF THE EASTERN PART OF MCLEAN  
COUNTY AS A LINK FOR SELLING FARM PRODUCTS  
AND BRINGING SUPPLIES TO THE SETTLEMENTS.

CROPSEY WOMAN'S CLUB

1976

## **CHAPTER 59**

### **The Pontiac Boys**

#### **Origins of the Rivalry Between Fairbury and Pontiac Boys**

In recent years, there is always an intense rivalry between athletic teams from Fairbury and Pontiac. The origins of this rivalry trace back to the late 1880s in Fairbury.

Alma Lewis James, in her book *Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars*, recounts the origins of this rivalry. She notes that the McDowell boys were some of the orniest boys to ever live in Fairbury. The case of the wagon wheels falling off illustrates some of the typical pranks executed by the McDowells.

The father of the McDowells was an older man and a preacher. While the father was busy preaching in the church, his sons would loosen all four wheels on his horse-drawn buggy. After church, the well-dressed preacher father would start to ride his buggy home. Before he went too far, one of the wagon wheels would fall off. The father would have to get greasy, attaching the wheel back to his buggy. When the father resumed his trip home, the rest of the wheels would eventually fall off.

The McDowell boys then discovered a new sport. They decided a piece of rubber hose could be used to crack the heads of people they did not like. For several nights, they hung around the dark alley of the Arcade Block (where the water tower is now located), busily cracking all heads that came into reach. There were a fair number of casualties before they were caught and arrested. They were let off with a fine. The editor of the Blade newspaper was incensed at the conduct of the McDowell boys. In the next week's edition of the Blade, he published an article with the headline, Rubber Hose, \$9.45 a foot."

The McDowell brothers decided their simple rubber hose needed some further refinement. After more ingenious development, their weapon became known as the "stuffed club." It was then widely used in Fairbury on the after-theatre crowds and Saturday night shoppers.

The victims were so numerous that when a "club" was finally captured, it was put on exhibition at the Blade office. This exhibition of the captured club drew crowds eager to inspect it.

The club proved to be a canvas sack, six inches in diameter and twelve inches long. It was tightly stuffed with excelsior and coarse salt, and tied to a stick two foot long. Excelsior is wood shavings that were typically used as a packing material.

As a weapon, it had range, weight, and flexibility, and quite easily knocked a man unconscious. For years, anyone attending the Quarterly Church Conference in Fairbury learned to be unusually wary.

A few well-placed arrests finally put a stop to the "stuffed club" activities. In 1890, the exasperated village fathers ended the rest of the trouble with a new ordinance. This new ordinance provided a twenty-five dollar fine for anyone maliciously disturbing a church service. This fine would be equivalent to a fine of \$665 in today's dollars.

Back in 1890, there were no movies, television, or radio. If a young man wanted to court a girl, they usually just sat on the front porch of the girl's house. The girl might play the piano while the boy sang. They might take a buggy ride as well.

In that era, the Pontiac boys had the reputation of being fancy and stylish dressers. They wore plug hats and were regular Beau Brummels. A plug hat was a top hat. It was a short version of an Abe Lincoln stovepipe hat. Beau Brummel was a very dapper dresser portrayed by actor Richard Mansfield in an 1890 Clyde Fitch play.

The first time a Pontiac boy appeared in Fairbury to court a young lady, he was let off with a warning. He received just a warning because it was assumed that ignorance was the cause of the mistake. But if he came again, the McDowell boys waited until he had reached his destination. Often the Pontiac boy would pause at the front gate to the girl's house. He would wipe the dust off his shoes using his pocket-handkerchief. At precisely this point in time, the



McDowell boys would fall upon him with rotten eggs. One dose of the rotten eggs was usually sufficient to keep him clear of Fairbury.

But if the Pontiac boy's bravery exceeded his discretion, he came calling on the Fairbury girl a third time. On this third offense, he got the stuffed club treatment, which was sure to be conclusive!

Fortunately, today's rivalries between Fairbury and Pontiac boys are much more amiable than the activities of the McDowell boys of the 1890s.

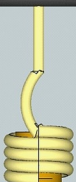


Actor Richard  
Mansfield as  
Beau Brummel



Canvas Bag  
Filled with  
Wood Chips  
and Rock Salt

Rope



24 Inch Long Wood Stick



## Fairbury Stuffed Club



**American Adult Baseball Bat**

## **CHAPTER 60**

### **Veteran's Memorial Park Historic Murals**

#### **Fairbury's Historic Murals Popular with Citizens and Visitors**

Back in 2015, Aldermen Terry Zimmerman and David Slagel formed the Fairbury Improvement Group. The mission of this group was to improve the quality of life for current residents, maintain the population, and attract more visitors to shop, dine, and enjoy Fairbury's recreational activities.

One of the improvement ideas generated by the group was to make Fairbury's rich history "come to life" through historical murals. A study was performed to determine how other communities display their murals. Pontiac had the Wall Dogs paint their murals onto buildings. These Pontiac murals required a lot of wall space and were relatively expensive. There was also a five year waiting period to schedule the Wall Dogs for a project.

In towns on a river, like Cincinnati, Ohio, and Maysville, Kentucky, murals are painted onto their concrete floodwalls. In both of these towns, their murals are very popular with both current residents and visitors.

Fairbury does not have any concrete floodwalls, so that was not an option. The idea was then generated to have five historic murals displayed on a wood support structure in Veteran's Memorial Park. The wood would be pressure-treated to increase the longevity and painted to match the yellow trim color of old City Hall.

The next question was what five areas of Fairbury history were to be displayed. It was determined the five topics would be the railroad, coal mining, Francis Townsend, the Fairbury Fair, and John Virgin's Horse Palace.

Another difficult decision was how to apply the artwork to the murals. One option was to have local artists hand draw each panel. Another option was to obtain or create high-resolution artwork that could be digitally printed

onto the large murals. The best option was to find or create high-resolution artwork and digitally publish the illustrations.

A historical search was done for information about the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad that founded Fairbury back in 1857. This railroad was later renamed the TP&W. In the 1993 video, ***The Toledo, Peoria, and Western***, one clip showed the first steam locomotive purchased by the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad. Latham & Co. in Vermont manufactured this first locomotive. An internet search found a scale drawing of their engine.

Unfortunately, the scale drawing of the steam locomotive was not high enough resolution to use on a four by eight-foot size mural. A new high-resolution image drawing was created from the old scale drawing. One of the challenges of redrawing the old locomotive was the cow-catcher bars in front of the engine. Each bar is in a different location and is at a different angle. The color scheme for the locomotive was a typical one used in the 1857 era.

When the old steam locomotive was redrawn, one interesting question was whether or not there should be a window in the front of the locomotive cab. Because of the size of the smokestack and bell, it would have been very challenging for the engineer to see anything from a front window. The decision was made not to have a window in the front of the cab.

For the coal mining mural, the Fairbury Echoes Museum had an extremely rare photograph of early Fairbury coal miners. A high-resolution scan of this photograph was utilized to create this mural. A high-resolution modern map of Fairbury was drawn to show the location of the three principal coal mines. Because many people had never seen what coal looks like, a contemporary photo of a pile of coal was also included on the mural.

Francis Townsend was born and raised in Fairbury. He went on to lead a national movement for an old-age pension. It is believed his campaign put political pressure on President Roosevelt to adopt the Social Security system we still have today.

The cornerstone idea of Townsend was that because of the Industrial Revolution; it was no longer necessary for children or the elderly to work.

This idea was well illustrated in a diagram in a book about the Townsend Movement. The lettering in the chart was replaced with high-resolution words so they would look correct on a large mural. Because the Townsend Movement had millions of members, you can still buy postcards and other items on eBay. For the mural, some Townsend Movement items were purchased from eBay. These eBay items were then scanned at high resolution for the murals.

For the Fairbury Fair and race track mural, a high-resolution image of the track and grandstands from 1922 was used. A 1911 Sanborn insurance map image of the track and fairground was redrawn in high-resolution format.

John Virgin was selected to represent Fairbury's rich agricultural history. He fought in the Civil War with Fairbury's 3rd Cavalry Company K. After the war, he became an importer of huge French draft horses called Percherons. He was active in the Fairbury Fair, the Illinois State Fair, and was appointed by the Governor to design the 1893 Chicago World's Fair agricultural exhibit.

He designed a unique building for his stables, called the Horse Palace. The only images of his Horse Palace were not good enough quality for a mural. Board by board, his Horse Palace was carefully redrawn using a computer drafting program. Carl Borngasser provided an original letterhead for John Virgin's business from the 1880s. The lettering on the letterhead was painstakingly redrawn to high resolution for the mural.

The Prairie Lands Foundation covered the material costs for this mural project. The City of Fairbury provided a beautiful new curved sidewalk to view the murals. Volunteers donated all the labor required to prepare the digital images and to construct the murals.

Many Fairbury citizens and their children have studied these murals. Many visitors to Fairbury also stop by and review all the murals. They do a great job of bringing Fairbury's rich history back to life.



## **CHAPTER 61**

### **Old Building Advertising Signs**

#### **Fairbury's Old Building Advertising Signs Popular with Visitors and Residents**

Back in 2015, Aldermen Terry Zimmerman and David Slagel formed the Fairbury Improvement Group. The mission of this group was to improve the quality of life for current residents, maintain the population, and attract more visitors to shop, dine, and enjoy Fairbury's recreational activities.

One of the improvement ideas generated by the group was to save Fairbury's ghost advertising signs painted on the sides of three buildings. The most massive ghost sign was the Occident Flour sign located at the northeast corner of Second and Locust Streets. Most of the old letters were still visible, with two exceptions. Several of the small letters on the bottom of the sign were missing. It was found that a modified Aerial font could be used to create patterns for new letters.

The letter "I" was completely missing in the word Occident. The Occident Flour company had their signs painted on many buildings in the Midwest. They used a very unique font with "bumps" at strategic points on the letters. An internet search found the same sign painted on a building in Minnesota. The image of the Minnesota letter "I" was scaled to match the height of the Fairbury sign. A template was made from thin plywood. The template was placed against the brick wall. A pencil was then used to trace the outline of the letter. Once the letter was penciled onto the brick wall, blue masking tape was used to outline the borders of the letter. Three coats of high-quality latex house paint were applied to paint all the sign letters.

One of the challenges of saving the Occident Flour ghost sign was how to get access to repaint the letters. There were electrical wires about six feet away from the building. Accessing all the letters required a stepladder, an extension ladder, scaffolding, and a man-lift. This sign was finished in August of 2016.

The second ghost sign saved was the Swing & Steidinger sign. Historical research found this sign was initially painted in 1891. The Swing & Steidinger partnership only lasted about two years. After the partnership ended, Joseph Swing opened his own hardware store about a block east of the Swing & Steidinger building. He and his family moved to LaPorte, Indiana, in 1914.

Because of the large number of people with the name Steidinger in the Fairbury area, it was very challenging to determine which Steidinger was in the partnership with Mr. Swing. With the assistance of some of the Steidinger family members, it was discovered that Alexander Steidinger was the man in business with Mr. Swing. After their partnership dissolved, Alexander spent the rest of his life farming in Fairbury.

The Swing & Steidinger sign lists many of the products the business sold back in 1891. Unfortunately, the three products on the west side of the sign were not legible. When Gordon Kinate purchased this building back in 1982, he placed a plea in the Blade newspaper to see if anyone knew what the missing words were. Former Fairbury Mayor Roy Taylor responded to Kinate's appeal. Roy said that when we got rain from the North, the letters became visible. Within a few weeks, Fairbury received a rain from the North. Gordon Kinate immediately climbed up to the second story of a building across the street from the Swing & Steidinger sign. Gordon recorded all the words on the sign, including the missing letters. The missing words turned out to be roofing, grouting, and repairing. Gordon's records were used to recreate the missing letters.

Access to repainting the Swing & Steidinger sign was also an issue. There were some electrical wires in the way of using a man-lift to paint the letters. The City of Fairbury crew temporarily relocated the cables so the old sign could be saved. The repainting of this sign was completed in May of 2017.

The last ghost sign saved was the Archer House. George Archer built the Archer House back in 1882. Sometime around 1892, the building name was changed to the Sherman Hotel.

Unfortunately, no old photographs of the Archer House are known to be in existence. The word "house" was still partially legible. This word gave a



clue that the original font was Clarendon. This font was invented in 1845, so it was age-appropriate for the Archer House sign painted in 1882.

Historical research found that in 1886, an average of 14 people per day stayed at the Archer House. The cost was \$2.00 per day or about \$55 per day in today's dollars.

Since the old hotel had two different names, a decision had to be made concerning which name to repaint. The decision was made to repaint the original 1882 Archer House sign. A computer drafting program was used to create the new 29 inch tall letters in Clarendon font. Thin plywood templates of each letter were made. The letters were painted using these templates.

The man-lift was set up on the street to start painting the new letters. Unfortunately, the man-lift would not extend far enough to reach the wall of the building. This inability of the lift to extend to the building was initially a baffling problem. The previous summer, the same man-lift had been successfully used to repaint the Swing & Steidinger sign. A tape measure revealed the answer to the mystery of why the man-lift did not have enough reach. The sidewalks on the north side of Locust Street were about nine feet wider than the sidewalks on the south side of the street. Once the man-lift was placed up onto the sidewalk closer to the building, the letters could be painted.

Another issue encountered was very high winds on the first day of painting. These high winds kept pushing the man-lift bucket away from the building. Sign painting was suspended that day due to the high winds. Work was resumed the next day when the winds had died down. This Archer House sign project was completed in May of 2018.

The material costs for these three projects were covered by either the building owner or the Prairie Lands Foundation. Volunteers donated all the labor for preparing the letter templates and doing the actual sign painting. The repainted old building advertising signs are very popular with current Fairbury residents. Visitors also enjoy seeing the century-old advertisements. They help to preserve the rich history of some of Fairbury's old businesses.







## **CHAPTER 62**

### **The First Murder**

#### **Fairbury's First Murder Case**

Since the first settler, Valentine Darnall, arrived south of town in 1829, there have been only eight murder cases in Fairbury's 190-year-old history. The first murder case was Ida Mae Steers in 1896.

The Steers, Darnall, and Travis families were among the early pioneers to settle in the Fairbury area. They primarily settled on land that was south of Fairbury. John G. Steers married Mary Ann Travis. They had eleven children. Their youngest child was Ida Mae Steers. She was born in 1878. The parents of Charles Burrell were John Burrell and Permelia A. Donaho. They had three boys named Ulysses, Charles, and Arthur. Charles was born in 1870 in the Arcade Block in Fairbury. Today, this is the area around the Fairbury water tower.

By 1880, Permelia was living separately from her husband. In the Census, she and her three sons were living with her parents, Jefferson and Eliza Donaho.

The July 1889 Pantagraph published a story about Charles Burrell severely mistreating a pony. Charles traveled from his home south of Fairbury to Pontiac. He traded his pony for another pony in Pontiac. After Charles got his new pony home, he became dissatisfied with his new pony and decided to trade it back in Pontiac. When Charles was about two miles away from Pontiac, he became enraged at his new pony. Charles severely beat the defenseless creature. He broke one of its legs in two places, broke three of its ribs, and knocked out one eye. He took off the saddle and walked away, leaving the pony to suffer. The Humane Society of Pontiac had the horse shot and disposed of the animal. An arrest warrant was issued for Charles, but he fled by train to Missouri, where his father lived.

In 1893, the father of Ida Mae Steers passed away. Ida was only fourteen years old when her father died. After her father died, Ida went to live with

her brother, Bert Steers. His farm was in Belle Prairie Township, about seven miles south of Fairbury.

In December of 1895, Charles Burrell joined the family of Bert Steers as his hired hand. In the Spring of 1896, Charles was twenty-six years old. During March and April, he attempted to court the seventeen-year-old Ida Mae Steers. She was young in appearance for her age.

Ida did not believe she was in a serious relationship with Charles Burrell, but he thought differently. His passion for Miss Steers grew rapidly and finally became distasteful to her. Ida informed Charles their affair had gone far enough. She refused to take a buggy ride with him in May of 1896. Her refusal excited him considerably. At this point, Ida was only a few weeks away from her eighteenth birthday.

The next day after being told the affair was over, Charles gained another interview with Ida. He proposed marriage to Ida and wanted her to elope with him immediately. She declined his marriage offer. She told Charles that her people had always been kind to her, and she would not treat them so disrespectfully now by eloping.

Charles became very much excited and made threats that he would make trouble for her and her family. That evening, he asked Bert Steers to get another hired hand. Charles told him that Ida had refused to marry him and that under the circumstances, he could not stay.

The next day, Mr. Steers went to Fairbury to search for a new hired hand. When he returned home, Charles Burrell told Mr. Steers that he had changed his mind and would like to remain his hired hand. Bert Steers then told Burrell he had better quit as he had first indicated. Mr. Steers paid him his final salary.

The next morning, Wednesday, Burrell helped do the chores. He then went to his room and put on his best clothes, but he forgot to take his trunk. When Mr. Steers requested that Charles Burrell take his chest with him, Charles replied that he would not because he never expected to work anymore. Charles Burrell then got in his buggy and drove away. Meantime, Miss Steers had become uneasy on account of Burrell's threats and had gone to stay with her sister, Mrs. John Masterson, who lived on a

farm belonging to M. M. Travis about a mile southeast. She had decided to go on Monday, but the persuasiveness of Mrs. Steers kept her until Tuesday noon. She was afraid of Burrell, but her family did not apparently share her fears.

Upon leaving the Steers farm, Burrell went east to Henry Darnall's, where he was acquainted. He went in and bade the family good-bye, saying he was going away. Burrell said there was some of his money in the hands of Mapel Bros. at Fairbury. He requested Mr. Darnall to get it after he got settled and send it to him. He probably went from there to Masterson's, where he arrived at about six o'clock. Ida saw him coming and did not wish to see him.

When Miss Steers saw Burrell driving up, she told her sister, Mrs. Masterson, that she did not wish to see him. She went into the parlor, which Mr. Masterson was sitting and said to him that Burrell was coming and that she did not want to see him.

Mr. Masterson, however, advised her that it would be better to see him and have a quiet talk with him. If she did this, maybe he would not bother her anymore. He then stepped out into the sitting room.

Burrell knocked at the west door and was admitted into the sitting room by Mr. Masterson. He said, "good morning," and asked if Ida was in the house. Being told she was, he asked to see her. Mrs. Masterson said she was in the parlor. Burrell then opened the parlor door and walked in, leaving the door open. Burrell immediately walked to where Ida was standing at the north end of the room. He placed his left hand on her shoulder and asked if she would "go with him." She answered "no sir" with considerable emphasis.

He immediately drew a revolver and placing it almost against her left breast, fired. The ball entered Ida's body near her heart. The ball fractured her fourth rib.

Burrell immediately stepped back a few feet, and turning the weapon on himself, pulled the trigger. The ball entered his breast, and he fell to the floor and died in a few minutes. Mrs. Masterson, who was in the sitting room, facing the east door, saw the flash of the first shot. Both Mr. and

Mrs. Masterson saw the second shot and rushed into the room. Ida Mae Steers screamed and held up both hands, but did not fall. Mr. Masterson supported her and walked her outside of the house. She was laid on a couch in the open air. Dr. Parsons was summoned from Fairbury to take charge of Miss Steers' care.

Ida Mae Steers suffered four days before she passed away. She is buried in the small Cooper Cemetery, southwest of Fairbury. She was seventeen years and eleven months old.

An inquest determined Charles Burrell came to his death by a pistol shot in his own hands in a fit of insanity. His body was removed to the residence of his aunt Mrs. Jarvil White, three and one-half miles south of town where the funeral was held Thursday. The burial location for Charles Burrell is unknown.

The murder of 17-year-old Ida Mae Steers seems to be a case where a psychotic man determined that if he could not have a woman for his bride, then nobody could have her as a bride.





JOHN C. STEERS.  
OCT. 26, 1834 — MAY 6, 1893.

IDA MAY STEERS  
MAY 31, 1872 — MAY 16, 1896.

L. B. STEERS.  
JULY 15, 1865 — JUNE 22, 1906.

STEERS

**A Lover's Revenge.**

Miss Ida May Steers was shot and probably fatally wounded on the farm of John Masterson at Cropsey by Charles Burrell. Burrell then put a bullet through his own head and died instantly. Miss Steers had refused to marry him. Miss Steers had no chance to recover as the bullet entered just above the heart. Burrell was a farm hand living in the Steers family.

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## **CHAPTER 63**

### **Livingston County Nurse**

#### **Fairbury Nurse Played Important Role in Livingston County Public Health**

The first full-time Livingston County Nurse was Miss Florence McConnell of Dwight. In 1947, the Livingston County Board of Supervisors appointed her as the public health nurse for Livingston County. Her primary duties were to serve as a liaison worker between schools and homes, medical and dental professions, and community groups. Regularly scheduled visits to schools were included in her program. At the schools, she would conduct physical examinations, vision tests, and eventually hearing tests. She made home visits to follow up on health matters found at school when necessary.

Miss McConnell served as the county health nurse for seven years. When she resigned, the board voted to close the office entirely until a new nurse could be found. Miss McConnell was receiving a salary of \$3,300 at the time of her resignation in 1954. This salary would be equivalent to \$31,200 in today's dollars.

Frances Ann Bodley was born in 1895 in Lodemia, northwest of Fairbury. Her parents were John and Luella Bodley. She graduated from Lakeside Hospital School of Nursing in Chicago in 1917. She enlisted in the U.S. Army Nurses Corps in 1918. She served as an Army nurse during WWI at a hospital in Chicago. After the war ended, she was a public health nurse in Oklahoma, then in Maysville, Kentucky. She married Maysville farmer Clarence Francis Maley in 1927. They moved from Kentucky to Lodemia in 1934.

After moving back to Lodemia, she worked as a nurse and teacher. In 1954, she was selected to replace Miss McConnell as the Livingston County Nurse. Her starting salary was \$3,600 annually.

Mrs. Maley was a short woman who was just over five feet tall. Many Fairbury residents who attended school in the 1950s and 1960s remember her as the short nurse who gave them hearing and vision tests.

For Mrs. Maley, the roads and the days were never too long for her to answer an appeal for help. Sometimes these calls for help were not too pleasant. There was the father whom she tried to deter from mistreating his child. There were times when teachers called her because some child in the room had "pediculosis" (head lice.) Mrs. Maley was known to leave her office in the county courthouse at night with barber shears, soap, and ointment in her doctor's bag to call at a home. She would then cut, and shampoo the girl's long hair, and instruct the girls and their mother as to proper treatment. The county superintendent's office often jokingly asked her when she was going to get her barber's license.

The Livingston County Health Nurse always cooperated with the Livingston County Tuberculosis Association in administering T.B. Tests in the schools. In 1955, of 1,578 high school and seventh and eighth graders tested, 13.3% showed a positive reaction.

In 1955, the Salk polio vaccine was administered in the county for the first time. Mrs. Maley set up a schedule of vaccinations in cooperation with the schools. The vaccine was delivered in schools by local doctors. Three shots, two to four weeks apart, and a third booster shot six months later were required. One thousand four hundred fifty students in first and second grades took advantage of the program.

P.T.A.'s in three towns, Fairbury, Forrest, and Chatsworth, sponsored dental fluoride treatments under the direction of Mrs. Maley, in the second, fifth, and eighth grades. Four treatments per year were required.

Mrs. Maley checked the hearing and vision of about 6,000-grade children each year and, at the same time, inspected children for skin infections. She sent notes to parents of children with defects for a referral to a doctor. Children with vision defects, whose parents were unable to provide further care, were referred to various civic groups that had service programs for children.

In 1946, a state law was passed requiring every child to have a physical examination before entering school. That program was expanded to include kindergarten or first grade, fifth grade and ninth grade. Mrs. Maley kept a record which included immunizations on each child. Mrs. Maley recommended polio shots, as well.

Mrs. Maley also assisted with the Bloodmobile in Pontiac, Fairbury, Cullom, and the Pontiac Prison. The state also required that the county health nurse send progress reports on all premature babies weighing less than five pounds at birth.

She referred adults as well as children to the state division of vocational rehabilitation. Occasionally, she referred men who had lost limbs in farm or other accidents and who could not afford to pay for artificial limbs themselves. In cooperation with the Cancer Society, she supervised the making of sterile dressings and gave them to people who needed them.

She was so interested in the plight of mentally disabled children that she was one of the moving forces in the organization of parent groups for mentally disabled children in Livingston County in 1961. She, in cooperation with the county superintendent of schools, invited the parents of 30 children to an organizational meeting. It was this group that made public presentations and representations to school boards, which eventually were to result in classes for the mentally disabled in the county. In 1963, Mrs. Maley organized the mass Sabin polio vaccine program presented by the Zonta Club of Pontiac (a service club for women) at which an estimated 4,300 persons received the vaccine.

In 1968, after serving as the Livingston County Nurse for fourteen years, Mrs. Maley contracted leukemia. In that era, the only medical treatment for leukemia was to administer blood transfusions. Mrs. Maley would get a blood transfusion in the morning, then continue for the rest of her day performing her nursing duties. She died in June of 1968.

After Mrs. Maley died in 1968, Mrs. Charlotte Killus was appointed to carry out her many duties. Mrs. Killus retired in 1970, and the school health program became a responsibility of the Livingston County Health Department. At that time, four nurses, each with responsibility for about

one-fourth of the county, and the County Public Health Nurse, Mrs. Gladys Kohrt, cared for the health needs of the schools.



Frances A. Bodley - Maley

## **CHAPTER 64**

### **Francis Townsend**

#### **Fairbury's Most Nationally Famous Citizen**

At the age of fifty in 1853, Nathan Townsend purchased forty-four acres from the U.S. government. This land was located just east of Fairbury and just north of Route 24. He built a log cabin on this property. In the 1860 U.S. Census, Nathan was living on this land with his son George W. Townsend.

In 1861, son George W. Townsend married Sarah Ann Harper, in Livingston County. In 1866, son Francis Everett Townsend was born in a log cabin near his grandfather Nathan's land. This farmland, like the other farmland in the Fairbury area, was very wet and swampy until it was tiled in the 1880s.

Francis Townsend grew up in this log cabin and attended Rudd country school. In his autobiography, *New Horizons*, Townsend recounted what his life was like growing up in the Fairbury area in the 1870s. One of Townsend's earliest memories was being carried by his mother to the higher ground of the horse stable area during one of the periodic floods. He remembered watching his father wade hip-deep into the water that had invaded the barnyard during the night. His father untied the horses and drove them to higher ground.

Townsend said that during his childhood and youth he would constantly shake in the summer with swamp malaria. They called it "ager" or "chills and fever." Townsend believed these illnesses kept him from developing into an athletic boy. Francis remembered how good it felt to his chill-racked body when his mother carried him out to the sunny side of the house as a child. She would place him where she could keep an eye on him while she worked at her cheese-making or at the lye kettle, making soap for the family.

When Townsend was eighteen, in 1884, he remembers that his father had their farmland tiled a few years before that date. Tiling eliminated the

swamp and the ailments that went with living in a wet area. Townsend's father decided that farming was too difficult of an occupation. The land his grandfather bought from the government for \$2.50 an acre was sold for \$55 an acre. Tiling the land changed it from worthless swampland into some of the most productive farmland on the planet. In 1884, Townsend's father decided to move the family to Nebraska and invest in a hardware store.

In Nebraska, Townsend studied a couple of years at a local school academy. Then he and his brother decided to strike out on their own. They first went to California and went into the hay business. They then went to work as ranch hands on a large Los Angeles ranch. Francis then worked in the Seattle area at various jobs including a moving company. From 1890 through 1893, he went back to Nebraska and graduated from the Franklin Academy.

In 1893, Townsend tried his hand at farming near his sister in northwestern Kansas. He was not successful at farming and tried being a country school teacher. Townsend later worked about a year as a traveling salesman selling Home Comfort cooking ranges in Kansas. He saved his money and at age thirty-one, started to attend medical school at Omaha Medical College in 1899. After finishing medical school, Townsend moved to Belle Fourche, South Dakota, and began practicing medicine. He met a widowed nurse, Wilhelmina Mollie Bogue, with a nine-year-old daughter. At the age of forty in 1906, he married Wilhelmina.

Townsend had personal health issues his whole life. After almost twenty harsh South Dakota winters, he decided to move to warmer Long Beach, California, in 1919. They moved to Los Angeles in 1938, so his granddaughter could live with them and attend college.

The Wall Street stock market crash of 1929 signaled the start of the Great Depression. Unemployment reached twenty-five percent. Millions of people were thrown out of work. A couple of years after the Depression started, Townsend looked out his kitchen window in Long Beach, California. He was horrified to see three elderly women scrounging for edible food scraps in garbage cans. Townsend then got the idea there should be a relief program for the aged. He thought the Industrial



Revolution had eliminated the need for the very young and very old to have to work.

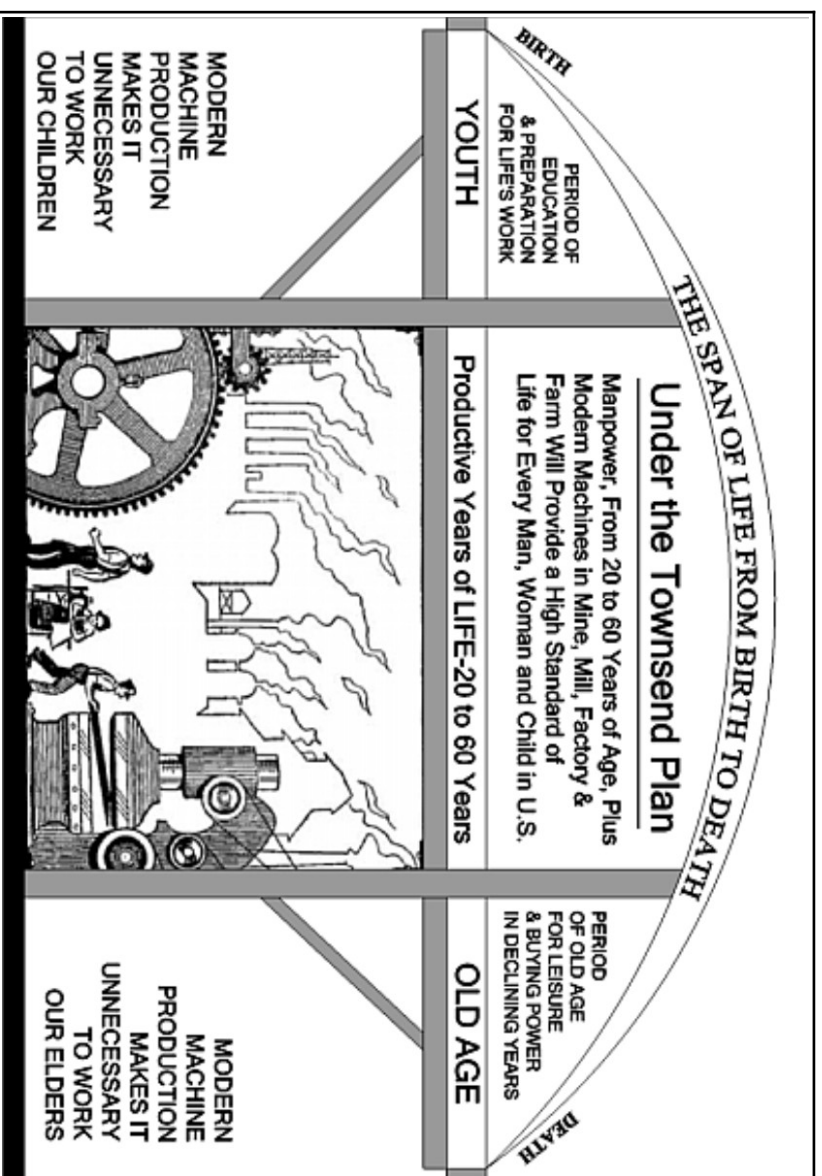
Townsend's idea was to have a government old-age pension plan that would pay each person over sixty a pension of \$200 per month. This would be equivalent to \$47,000 per year in today's dollars. Townsend also proposed the pension money had to be spent in the same month it was received to stimulate the economy.

To pay for his new old-age pension plan, he suggested several alternatives including a 3% income tax, a national sales tax, and a 2% tax on all transactions. Most economists said none of these proposed taxation methods would begin to pay for the \$200 per month for the nine to twelve million people aged sixty or older.

Townsend began to promote his Townsend Plan for an old-age pension. It was wildly popular, and 3,400 Townsend Clubs sprung up overnight all over the country. His political movement put massive political pressure on President Roosevelt to adopt some type of old-age pension plan. This political pressure caused President Franklin D. Roosevelt to sign the original Social Security Act into law in 1935.

Initially, the Social Security system was funded by a two percent income tax. Today the employee and employer pay a total of 15.34% of earnings. Instead of Townsend's proposed pension of \$47,000 at age sixty, the current system pays out an average of \$16,400 to those over age sixty-five.

Townsend returned to Fairbury nine times from 1939 to 1947. The city celebrated this native son's return with events called Townsend Homecomings. He died in 1960. He is often called the father of the Social Security System. When you enter the Fairbury post office, look to your right, and you will see the Francis Townsend plaque. One of the five historic murals in Veteran's Memorial Park is also dedicated to Francis Townsend.



## **CHAPTER 65**

### **1918 Spanish Flu**

#### **How Fairbury Coped with the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic**

The worst pandemic to face humanity occurred in the Middle Ages. The Plague, or Black Death, was caused by the bacterium *Yersinia Pestis*. This pandemic caused the deaths of an estimated 75 to 200 million people in Eurasia, peaking in Europe from 1347 to 1351. The Black Death probably originated in East Asia, from where it traveled along the Silk Road, reaching Crimea by 1343. From there, it was most likely carried by fleas living on the black rats that traveled on Genoese merchant ships, spreading throughout the Mediterranean Basin, reaching the rest of Europe via the Italian peninsula.

The Black Death is estimated to have killed 30% to 60% of Europe's population. In total, the plague may have reduced the world population from an estimated 475 million to 350–375 million in the 14th century. It took 200 years for Europe's population to recover to its previous level.

The second most deadly pandemic was the Spanish Influenza of 1918. It was caused by the H1N1 influenza virus. It infected 500 million people around the world, or about 27% of the then world population of between 1.8 and 1.9 billion, including people on isolated Pacific islands and in the Arctic. The death toll is estimated to have been anywhere from 17 million to 50 million, and possibly as high as 100 million, making it one of the deadliest epidemics in human history. Historical and epidemiological data are inadequate to identify with certainty the pandemic's geographic origin.

The Spanish Flu pandemic occurred in the middle of World War I. As the virus spread to different continents, the countries involved in the war did not want to publicize this pandemic. Participants in the war did not want their opponents to know how badly their countries were impacted. Spain was not involved in World War I, and it was one of the few countries that

published the devastating impact the virus was having on their land. Therefore, this pandemic became known as the Spanish Flu.

Ordinary influenza usually impacts the very young and the very old. The Spanish Flu was unique because it also affected healthy adults between the ages of 20 and 40. This age group mainly died from secondary infections like pneumonia. The Spanish Flu killed more soldiers in World War I than battle injuries.

Worldwide data shows the most Spanish Flu deaths occurred in October and November of 1918. The Fairbury Blade newspaper published no stories about Spanish Influenza until 1918. The most Blade stories happened in October 1918, which matches the experience of the rest of the world.

The October 4, 1918, Blade had several Spanish Flu-related articles. The first article noted there were three deaths from this pandemic at the Fairbury hospital. The first death was Tony Panzarella from Forrest. The second death was a particularly sad case. Mrs. Margaret Wright died of the Spanish Flu and left an infant child. Her husband was serving in the U.S. Army in France. The grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. George Wright of Dwight, took custody of their grandchild. The last death was World War I veteran Fred Hartley.

The second article in this edition was a plea for help from the Forrest Hospital. They asked the Red Cross for additional hospital shirts, sheets, pillowcases, and single beds. They had so many Spanish Flu patients that they had to add temporary beds. Their five physicians were barely keeping up with the new cases.

On October 6, 1918, Sam R. Zimmerman died at Camp Grant in Rockford from the Spanish Flu. On October 8, Wilford G. Estep died at Camp Gordon from pneumonia he contracted as a result of the Spanish Flu.

William Henry Eckhart lived in Weston but graduated from Fairbury Township High School. He completed basic military training, then got assigned to Fort Bliss in Texas for additional training. His commanding officer sent a message to his parents saying their son was very ill with pneumonia after contracting the Spanish Flu. William's father immediately

traveled from Weston to Fort Bliss. He arrived just in time to visit with his son for 30 minutes before he passed away from the Spanish Flu.

In the October 11 issue of the Blade, the Wade Drug Store ran an ad with recommendations on how to prevent and treat cases of the Spanish Flu. This ad had most of the same advice as with the current Coronavirus, except the recommendation to wash your hands often was not included.

All of the patients in the Forrest hospital recovered, and the Wabash railroad provided free ice for the patients. The Baptist and Christian Churches canceled their Sunday services, and very few people attended services at the other churches. School attendance shrunk down to almost no students. Fourteen of the sixteen players on the Fairbury Township High School football team contracted the Spanish Flu.

On October 17, 1918, Truman Williams Carrithers died at Walter Reed Hospital from the Spanish Flu. He was a West Point graduate and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

There were no further articles about the Spanish Flu in the Blade after October except the death notice of Elmer Steffen from Cropsey in February of 1919. He died from the Spanish Flu on February 21, 1919, while on leave from Camp Wheeler in Georgia.

It will be interesting to see how the current Coronavirus epidemic plays out until it eventually ends. The first wave of the 1918 Spanish Flu was no worse than ordinary seasonal Flu. It is believed to have then mutated to a more deadly form, which impacted healthy people in their 20s and 30s. Deaths from the second wave peaked in October and November of 1918. In our modern world, we have much more knowledge and a better health care system than in 1918 to deal with new viruses.

# What you should do to Dodge the “Flu”

Fresh air is the best preventive and cure.

The present Influenza is nothing but the Grip.

The average person stands an even chance of escaping the disease, and can improve this chance of escape by—

Keeping away from persons with colds.

Keeping out of crowds.

Avoiding illy ventilated places.

Keeping warm.

## **PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE**

The person who finds himself taking a cold had better—

Go to bed in a well ventilated room.

Keep warm.

Send for a physician.

If no physician is available use—

Hot foot baths.

Hot general baths.

We have everything needed for a sick room.

## Wades Drug Store

Fairbury Blade Ad, October 11, 1918

## **CHAPTER 66**

### **World War II Rationing**

#### **Fairbury Citizens All Pull Together to Win World War II**

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. This surprise attack prompted the entrance of the United States into World War II. Immediately after the war started, military planners determined that rubber was the most critical material needed for a successful military campaign. In that era, all of the rubber in the world came primarily from rubber tree plantations in the Singapore area. Shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese seized all of the rubber plantations around Singapore.

Rubber was used to make an incredible amount of items needed for the war. For example, each Sherman tank required a half a ton of rubber and some battleships contained 20,000 rubber parts. A heavy bomber airplane required 1,825 pounds of rubber per plane.

Military planners suggested seven steps to cope with the rubber shortage. These suggestions included scrap rubber drives, conduct a world-wide search for other types of plants that produce rubber, develop synthetic rubber, ration tires for the civilian population, institute a thirty-five MPH speed limit, ration gasoline, and stop production of any new cars. President Roosevelt thought it would be too much of a shock to the general public if both tire and gasoline rationing were instituted at the same time. He decided tire rationing would be instituted first in 1942, and one year later, gasoline rationing would be implemented.

The work of issuing ration books and exchanging used stamps for certificates was administered by some 5,500 local ration boards of mostly volunteer workers selected by local officials. Some items, such as sugar, were distributed evenly based on the number of people in a household. Other things, like gasoline or fuel oil, were rationed only to those who could justify a need.

Each ration stamp had a generic drawing of an airplane, gun, tank, aircraft carrier, an ear of wheat, fruit, etc. and a serial number. The kind and amount of rationed commodities were not specified on most of the stamps. These stamps were explained later when local newspapers published, for example, that beginning on a specified date, one airplane stamp was required (in addition to cash) to buy one pair of shoes, and one stamp number 30 from ration book four was needed to buy five pounds of sugar. The commodity amounts changed from time to time, depending on availability. Red stamps were used to ration meat and butter, and blue stamps were used to ration processed foods.

There was a black market in stamps. To prevent this, the OPA ordered vendors not to accept stamps unless the vendor tore it out of the ration book. Buyers, however, circumvented this by saying (sometimes accurately, as the books were not well-made) that the stamps had "fallen out." In actuality, they may have acquired stamps from other family members or friends or the black market.

In January of 1943, three firms were named as the Fairbury periodic tire inspectors. These three firms were Fairbury Auto Company, Steidinger Super Service Station, and Si L. Moser's Service Station. The Steidinger station was also appointed to be a technical tire inspector.

Citizens were only entitled to own five tires per vehicle during the rationing period. If you held more than five tires, you had to turn them into the ration board. The serial numbers of the five tires were recorded. During the first year after World War II started, virtually no new tires were available. In that era before the invention of tubeless tires, each tire also had an inner tube. If a tire got a worn spot, people often stuffed old newspapers between the tire and the inner tube to increase the tire life.

Tires became so scarce that tire thefts started to take place. In March of 1942, James Moore of Fairbury tried a tire theft scheme. He observed that a neighbor, Elmer Koehl, had new tires on his trailer. James Monroe then borrowed the trailer from Elmer. When he got the trailer home, he exchanged the new trailer tires with some very worn tires he had. To keep Elmer from finding out his new tires had been stolen, James drove the trailer down a muddy road. He returned the trailer to Elmer with very dirty tires. Soon, rain washed the mud from the trailer tires. Elmer then



noticed his new tires had been replaced with very worn tires. Elmer notified the police of the theft and gave the authorities the serial numbers of the new tires. Mr. Moore was found to be in possession of the new tires. Mr. Moore was arrested and charged with tire theft.

Many area citizens canned fruit and vegetables from their gardens each year. Most canning recipes involve the use of sugar. If you were going to can your food, you could apply and receive an additional ration of sugar. For families that canned a great deal of food, this additional allotment of sugar was not enough. In one Fairbury area case, a family who did a lot of canning traded some of their meat ration stamps for sugar ration stamps. The sugar ration stamps came from a family that did not do canning.

The Fairbury city schools and the surrounding country schools were used to administrate the rationing system. Someone from each household had to go to the school and apply for rationing books and stamps. Later, another trip had to be made to the school to pick up the ration book and stamps. Around 1944, the U.S. postal system was used to administer the program instead of mandatory trips to the schools.

As the war went on, more and more items were rationed. It soon became very complicated to keep track of all the rationed items. The ration stamps had expiration dates, and you wanted to use your stamps before they expired. During World War II, one of the largest grocery stores in Fairbury was located in Walton's department store. This grocery store ran many Blade ads to try to help consumers navigate the complicated rationing program.

The citizens of Fairbury were united in their commitment to winning World War II. Fairbury provided 345 men and nine women to serve in the military. Citizens conducted scrap metal drives and scrap rubber drives. The people of Fairbury considered the rationing program a necessary temporary evil needed to win World War II.

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION



## WAR RATION BOOK FOUR

Issued to \_\_\_\_\_  
(Print first, middle, and last names)

Complete address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### READ BEFORE SIGNING

In accepting this book, I recognize that it remains the property of the United States Government. I will use it only in the manner and for the purposes authorized by the Office of Price Administration.

*Void if Altered*

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

*It is a criminal offense to violate rationing regulations.*

OPA Form R-145

16-85570-1

## **CHAPTER 67**

### **Fairbury Ice Businesses**

#### **Keeping Food Cool Was Not Always Easy**

Indian Creek flows through Fairbury and ice often forms during the winter months. Starting in the 1880s, various parties began to cut ice in the winter and store it in ice houses. In 1888, Pfaat & Slaughter operated a butcher shop located on Indian Creek. They built their own ice house to help preserve the meat they cut.

The most significant figures in Fairbury's ice house business were Conrad Munz Sr. and his son Conrad Munz Jr. The elder Munz was born in 1841 in Sulgen, Switzerland. He was the son of Jacob Munz and Elizabeth Altweg. In 1871, Conrad Munz Sr. married Catharina Blumer in Switzerland. Two years later, Conrad and Catharina moved from Switzerland to the Forrest, Illinois area. Son Conrad Munz Jr. was born in Forrest in 1887. He married Ida Metz in 1914.

In 1888, Conrad Munz Sr. moved his family from Forrest to a 200-acre farm just south of Fairbury. He grew sorghum on his farm and built a factory to convert sorghum to molasses.

In 1890, Frank Adams built a new ice house on Locust Street. He was one of the first men to produce and sell ice in Fairbury.

In 1895, Conrad Munz Sr. dug a hole on his farm to bury a dead horse for John Bolliger. He noted that gravel and sand were found just below the topsoil. This discovery prompted the formation of the Fairbury Sand and Gravel Works. This operation was in business from 1895 to 1940. Conrad Munz J. was the proprietor. At its peak, it could pump 100 to 200 cubic yards of sand per day. The resultant pond was commonly called Munz's sandpit.

Conrad Munz Sr. suffered a major accident in Forrest in 1897. He fell under the wheels of a moving train car which cut off his right leg above

the knee. He was fifty-six years old when the accident occurred. He survived this horrible accident.

In 1907, the molasses factory burned down. A new and larger factory was built. The new factory could produce thousands of gallons of molasses per year. This new factory had a tall brick smokestack. The second factory eventually burned down, leaving only the tall brick smokestack. This smokestack was removed just a few years ago. It was just east of the golf course clubhouse.

In 1908, Conrad Munz Sr. embarked on another business enterprise. He built a large ice house just north of the Munz sandpit. The ice house was sixty feet by one-hundred-fifty feet. It was divided into four different sections. Each section was filled separately during the winter. The ice house was built right next to the Munz sandpit to minimize the distance the ice had to be moved from the sandpit.

Each year in the winter, ice was cut from the Munz sandpit. An inclined ramp was used to move the ice from the sandpit to the ice house. The ice blocks were packed in sawdust to prevent them from melting. Each day, a horse-drawn wagon would carry the ice blocks up and down the streets of Fairbury. The ice delivery man would carry a block of ice to each home and place it in the icebox. Often, the homeowner would display a tag on the door telling the delivery man what size block they wanted. The ice was usually sold in twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five, and 100-pound blocks.

The block of ice was usually placed in the top of the insulated icebox. Food was stored in the lower compartments. The older iceboxes were made of wood with tin inside to contain the water. Later iceboxes were insulated steel boxes. Several Fairbury homes had a special icebox where the delivery man did not have to come into the house. He first opened a door on the outside of the house. He then slid the ice block right into the icebox inside the home. One of the homes with this special ice box was at 518 South Third Street.

The 1920 Blade newspaper pronounced Conrad Munz Jr., the new Ice Baron of Fairbury. He bought out his competitor, M. M. Jacobs, and renamed the business the Fairbury Ice Company.

Just a few months later, Mr. Frye announced that he had formed a new company called the Citizens Ice Co. He planned on manufacturing artificial ice from distilled water and to sell it for sixty cents per 100 pounds of ice. He bragged that in 1921, his company would be the leading ice company in Fairbury. Many companies were beginning to sell commercial refrigeration equipment powered by electricity.

The new Citizen's Ice Company had a rocky start. In the first year of business, the horse team pulling the ice wagon ran away. The wagon tore out the street signpost at the corner of Locust and Second streets. In 1934, the Citizens Ice Company went out of business and was taken over by King Brothers ice and coal distributors.

In 1925, Conrad Munz Jr. bought the Perlee cold storage building at 6th and Walnut. He converted it to a combination ice house and cold storage building. Stanley Perlee built this structure in 1881 as cold storage for his produce business.

In 1930, the first advertisement for an electric refrigerator appeared in the Blade. It was a General Electric brand that sold for \$205. In today's dollars, this would be \$3,122. The refrigerators were sold by Nussbaum Brothers, the "Scientific Plumbers and Contractors."

In 1931, Conrad Munz Sr. died at age 90. In the mid-1930s, Conrad Munz Jr. started selling about sixty electric refrigerators a year.

In 1945, ice cutting operations ceased. Electric refrigerators had largely replaced iceboxes. The warehouse next to the sandpit was abandoned, and it burned down in 1948. In 1956, the old ice house at Sixth and Walnut was torn down to make room for an implement storage facility.

In 1961, Conrad Munz Jr. died. His death ended the era of home delivery of ice to stock the iceboxes of Fairbury citizens.



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Poison  
or Foul  
Smell  
in

## McCray's Wood or Tile Lined Family Refrigerators

Substantially built and well insulated, with a view to cleanliness and convenience, as well as economy in ice. The Automatic Circulation of Cold Air is perfect. If you will send us measurements we will build the refrigerator to order so that it will fit in the nook intended for it.

KEEP OUT THE ICEMAN and have him deliver ice from the outside. Catalogue No. 35 FREE

We also build refrigerators of all kinds and sizes for all purposes.

**McCray Refrigerator and Cold Storage Co.**  
**20 Mill Street, Kendallville, Ind.**

## **CHAPTER 68**

### **Temperance and Women's Voting Rights**

#### **Fairbury's Temperance Movement**

In the 1880s, Fairbury was a wild town. Several coal mines were operating in Fairbury at that time. These thirsty coal miners could patronize any of seven saloons in the village. There were two saloons per block along Main Street, plus one on the east end.

The saloons opened at six in the morning when the early birds went to work. They were busy all day long. They were the last of the businesses to close at night. After ten o'clock, the saloons closed, and the helplessly inebriated were thrown out into the alley, to be sorted over by their friends and taken home in wheelbarrows.

If a customer lacked the money for a drink, it usually could be charged. There were no minimum drinking age requirements. The saloons were swarming with boys. Gangs of drunken juveniles invested the whole village. Some of these boys were under ten years of age. They rampaged the streets until late at night and terrorized the inhabitants with their fighting and vandalism.

The pitiful horses of the drunkards were very noticeable. These horses were un-blanketed against the weather. They were left standing for hours in bad weather at their hitching posts in front of the saloons.

The chief reason for the general atmosphere of lawlessness was the attitude of society in the 1880s about drunkards. People reasoned that when a man was drunk, he did not have his normal faculties, and, therefore, did not realize what he was doing. Consequently, he was not to be held accountable for any of his actions during that time. He could kill a man, yet go scot-free, whereas a sober man would be hung.

Excessive drinking and alcoholism were chronic problems of that era. Preachers and medical doctors saw the negative impacts on Fairbury

families every day. There were no minimum drinking age laws. There were no support groups for alcoholics like Alcoholics Anonymous.

Women felt particularly frustrated at the excessive drinking problem. If a husband drank excessively, the social norms of that era said a woman could not work outside the home to provide for her family. Women also did not have the right to vote. They could not vote to ban alcohol or vote for politicians who were Prohibitionists.

Women across the United States were frustrated at the excessive drinking problem. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was organized in late 1873 in Ohio. They were among the first organizations of women devoted to social reform. Their program linked the religious and the secular through concerted and far-reaching reform strategies based on applied Christianity. This organization was a strong supporter of the temperance movement. They also supported the right of women to vote in elections.

In the July 30, 1886 edition of the Blade, the Editor scolded both the citizens and politicians of Fairbury. The Editor pointed out the Village Board took in a great deal of tax money from the saloons each year. None of this money was being used to combat the most significant problems Fairbury was facing at that time. These problems included churches standing vacant, streets growing up in weeds, boys and hoodlums exercising their own home rule, no fire protection system, and no safe public water supply. The Editor thought this situation ought to make all citizens blush with shame.

One of the most active years for the temperance movement in Fairbury was in 1894. The Livingston County branch of the national WCTU held a three-day meeting at the Baptist Church in Fairbury. The wife of Dr. George C. Lewis, Ella Beach Lewis, was the county chairwoman of this group. She was the mother of Alma Lewis James, Fairbury historian. They had a massive attendance at the meetings. They recruited Dr. Carrie Shaw, a Chicago women's activist, and evangelist, to be one of the featured speakers at the conference.

On one side of the temperance battles were the saloon owners who profited from patrons buying alcohol in their establishments. The Village Board



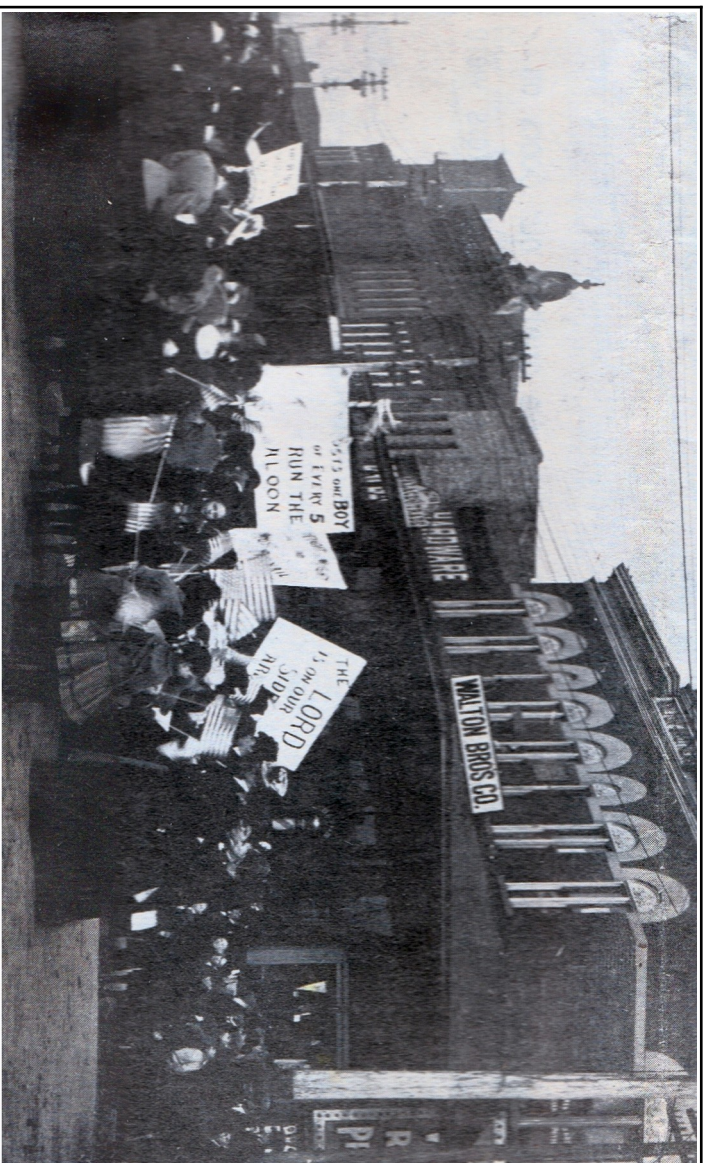
had to be respondent to the Fairbury men who voted them into office. The annual fees from the saloons helped to pay for most of the government activities of Fairbury. On the other side of the battle were the women who encountered the ill effects of excessive drinking. Ministers and medical doctors were also in favor of prohibiting alcohol because they saw the negative impacts on Fairbury families. Because women could not yet vote, they would often stage massive anti-alcohol marches on Main Street at election times. They would make their husbands attend the demonstrations as well to try to threaten the saloon owners since their husbands could vote.

Eventually, the Fairbury Village Board bowed to public pressure and instituted stricter regulation of the saloons. New village ordinances required each saloon keeper to post a three-thousand dollar bond. Each liquor license had a cost of \$600, and it could be revoked. The hours of business for the saloons were shortened. They could not open before 5 AM and had to close by 10 PM. The saloons had to be kept reasonably clean, and the windows washed. Clean windows allowed people outside of the bar to have a clear view of the inside of the establishment. No pool tables or any games of any nature were allowed. No rowdiness was permitted.

Saloon keepers could no longer sell liquor to minors. Boys were no longer allowed in the place, nor were they permitted to carry buckets of beer to their fathers or any other relatives.

Worst of all, according to the saloon owners, they were made to close on Sundays. Using the front door only, the owner or assistant might enter the building to tend to the fires or light the night lamp, but they could not stay a minute longer.

In 1919, two new amendments to the U.S. Constitution were ratified. The Eighteenth Amendment declared the production, transport, and sale of intoxicating liquors to be illegal. The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted American women the right to vote. Fourteen years later, in 1933, the Twenty-First Amendment repealed the Eighteenth Amendment, ending the nationwide prohibition of alcohol.



The Prohibitionist party was potent in Fairbury. Every local election was a fresh battle between the "wets" and the "drys." Since they were denied the power to vote, women were handicapped in their efforts but no means idle.

Just before the local option elections, they would join their husbands in mass meetings as a giant demonstration of public opinion calculated to worry the saloon people.

## **CHAPTER 69**

### **Golf Course History**

#### **Indian Creek Golf Course Still Going Strong After 94 Years**

In 1921, Orvin Payne, Bill Braun, and Jack McGreal laid out a three-hole golf course in the pasture of Conrad Munz Sr. The farm of Conrad Munz Sr. was on south Seventh Street, just south of Indian Creek.

In the summer of 1926, the Indian Creek Golf Club was formed in Fairbury. In July of 1926, construction began on a new nine-hole golf course. Twenty acres of land for the golf course was leased from the Conrad Munz Sr. estate. Dr. H. N. Leonard was assigned the task of putting the new golf course into shape.

The officers of the Indian Creek Golf Club were: President, Perry J. Keck; Vice-President, John F. Odell; Secretary-Treasurer, J. W. Wade. The members of the Board of Directors were Dr. H. N. Leonard, W. B. Mitten, A. K. Hirstein, C. R. Voris, and Frank Phelps.

At least sixty-seven people became the charter members of the Indian Creek Golf Club. Of these sixty-seven people, seven of them were women. These seven women were Clara Roth, Agnes Broadwell, Marguerite Cook, Cora Evans, Bertha Eppstein, Carolyn Blackwood, and Sue Baer.

The July 1926 Blade captured the spirit of the founding members when it recounted that golf courses are a good thing for the city and place it in the ranks of the cities that not only exist but thrive and advance, not to speak of the fine, clean, healthful out-of-door exercise which they afford.

The 1926 Pantagraph reported that when the new golf course south of Fairbury was complete, it will be the sportiest nine-hole course to be found in Central Illinois. The course was 1,780 yards long, and three of the holes had water hazards. A par score of thirty-two was set for the new golf course. A large force of volunteers helped to construct the new golf course.

Many golf courses constructed in the 1920s and 1930s used sand on the greens, compared to grass. Once each player chipped the ball onto the green, the one furthest from the hole smoothed a yard-wide stretch of sand from the ball to a foot past the hole. The sand was smoothed using a large lead pipe that was welded to another piece of metal for the handle, making a T shape.

Each player then placed the ball in the smoothed path, the same distance from where it was chipped. Each golfer putted down the smoothed path, with the farthest from the hole shooting first and the closest shooting last. Once all had putted, one player, usually the first to make the putt, raked out the green.

Growing and maintaining the grass on the greens is much more expensive than using sand. Almost all the golf courses converted to grass greens because the players preferred them over sand greens. Only a handful of golf courses in the United States still utilize sand for their greens.

The next significant change at the golf course occurred in the summer of 1948. The members volunteered to construct a clubhouse at the foot of Fifth Street. The new clubhouse was wood frame construction and was twenty by forty feet. The Blade noted that some of the volunteers building the new clubhouse might have missed their calling. W. E. Butcher was the manager of the Walton's Department Store, yet he had a natural knack at pushing a wheelbarrow of concrete. John Mapel, the harness maker, handled a mason's trowel as efficiently as he handled his knife and fork. Bob Spence dumped his wheelbarrow like he was upending a truck. H. J. Finnegan looked fine behind a short-handled shovel. Cliff Stephens and Edward Bach lay seemingly practiced hands on the concrete mixer. Dr. G. G. Seltman handled the cement blocks rather gingerly, yet he moved them from place to place in a satisfactory manner. Buck Morris, as a concrete footing finisher, need not worry about employment. Paul Hampsch of Honeggers was another who did well with the wheelbarrow. John Mapel Jr. was a good utility man.

The new clubhouse was dedicated in July of 1948. A potluck supper followed a golf tournament. One hundred forty people attended, including eighty-six members, thirty guests, and twenty-six children. When dusk arrived, a fireworks display lit up the sky above the golf course.

Watt Nakamura was a Fairbury resident and a photographer. Around 1960, he shot a fascinating 14-minute video of various scenes and golfers at the golf course. This video was donated to the Fairbury Echoes Museum and can be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/rho2op7>.

The next significant change to the golf course occurred in 1968 and 1969. The members contributed enough money to build a new and much larger clubhouse. The length of the course was increased by twenty-five percent because a new section of land south of the course became available. The sand greens were replaced with grass greens.

In 1975, the Pontiac Daily Leader recounted that six years after the major renovation had been completed, the Indian Creek golf course was one of the most beautiful and challenging courses in Central Illinois. In 1975, the officers were: John Wade, President; Ken Elliott, Vice-President; Jan Stephens, Secretary; Jerry Dowling, Treasurer. All of these four officers were on the Board of Directors. The other Directors were Al Tavener, Milton Kinate, and Bill Goslin. Ron Dohman was the operator of the pro shop and course superintendent. Joe Keeley was the clubhouse manager. There were 420 adult members at that time.

As the Indian Creek golf course approaches its 100th anniversary, it still a valuable recreational resource for Fairbury area citizens. In 2019, the golf course had approximately 180 members and three leagues. They also have a full-service restaurant. If you are interested in learning more information about the golf course, you can call 815-692-2655.



The first officers of the Indian Creek Country Club in 1926 posing on a sand green. From the left are Perry Keck, President, John F. Odell, Vice-President, and James Wade, Secretary-Treasurer.



## **CHAPTER 70**

### **Cigar Store Indians**

#### **Fairbury Optometrist Nationally Known Expert on Cigar Store Indians**

Anthony Whitford Pendergast was born in 1879 in Indiana. There were 11 children in his family. He attended local schools in Harrison County, Indiana. As a newsboy in his youth, Pendergast was fascinated by the cigar store "Indians" he saw all around the streets of his home town. This fascination started a life-long interest in collecting and repairing cigar store Indians. After finishing his local Indiana schools, he then attended and in 1899 graduated from the Chicago College of Ophthalmology.

In the 1900 U.S. Census, Anthony was living with his parents in Harrison County, Indiana. On the Census, he listed his occupation as a grocery store clerk. In 1902, at the age of 23, he married Inez Mae Tucker in Terre Haute, Indiana. Inez was 22 years old.

After they married, they moved to Fairbury, and he opened his own optometry office. In 1904, their first child, Marcella June Pendergast, was born. In 1909, son Lyman Maxwell Pendergast was born. In the early years of his practice, Dr. Pendergast drove a horse and buggy as far as Lexington and Chenoa. He would trade eyeglasses for anything, including chickens or eggs.

In the 1910 U.S. Census, Dr. A. W. Pendergast was operating his own eye doctor's office in Fairbury. His family was living at 304 East Elm Street. Dr. Pendergast had several hobbies. One of these was collecting Native American artifacts such as arrowheads in Fairbury fields. He became friends with famed Fairbury artifact collector Ben Nussbaum.

Another of his hobbies was collecting, restoring, and selling old cigar store Indian figures. He became nationally known for his expertise in repairing these figures.

In January of 1941, Mrs. Pendergast was killed in a car accident on an icy road by Weston. She was 58 years old, and funeral services were held in Terre Haute, Indiana. Within a few months of his wife's death, Dr. Pendergast sold his Fairbury house, and he moved to Terre Haute, Indiana.

In May of 1941, Dr. Pendergast moved 13 of his cigar store Indians from Fairbury to his new home in Terre Haute, Indiana. Each of the 13 statues was placed in a heavy-duty cardboard box in the back of his brother's delivery truck. Then each box was filled with sand. This method allowed the figures to stand up in their normal orientation while they shipped. Dr. Pendergast estimated the value of the 13 statues was \$4,500. This value would be equivalent to \$79,200 in today's dollars. All the figures were transported safely to Dr. Pendergast's new home in Terre Haute.

Helen E. Joyner was born in 1888 in Clinton, Indiana. She married Cassius Malone, and they had one child, Harold Malone. Mr. Cassius Malone died in 1944. Shortly after her first husband died, Helen married Dr. A. W. Pendergast in Terre Haute, Indiana.

During World War II, a series of short movie clips were produced, and they were titled Unusual Occupations. They were typically only one to two minutes each in length. In 1942, one of these clips was made featuring Dr. Pendergast in his Terre Haute workshop. This movie was filmed just after he had moved from Fairbury to Terre Haute. In the short clip, Dr. Pendergast is shown restoring an old cigar store Indian. Part of his collection of figures is also shown. This old video can still be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/v5edk56>.

In 1953, Dr. Pendergast and W. Porter Ware jointly published a book titled Cigar Store Figures in American Folk Art. In their publication on the cigar store figure, Dr. Pendergast and co-author W. Porter Ware stated that the earliest evidence of cigar store figures dated them to as early as 1600 in the city of Amsterdam. In that city, a tobacconist's shop had a figure of an American black slave as his sign, because of the association between slaves and tobacco. The tradition was continued in England, and the statues began to look more like American Indians, usually with feathered headdresses, often holding a pipe or a roll of tobacco leaves.



The book also noted that not all the figures were of Indians or slaves. As their popularity spread, "Turks," "Moors," Scotsmen, jockeys, Roman characters, mythological figures, and others were used. Antiquarian John L. Morrison, cited by Mr. Pendergast in his 1953 book *Cigar Store Figures*, stated that the first appearance of a cigar store "Indian" in America was in 1770 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the cigar store figure (usually an Indian) was as much a symbol of the tobacco trade as the barber pole was of barbershops. Mr. Pendergast owned at least two hundred figures during his lifetime and was a noted expert on the genre. He sold many figures to other collectors and had a workshop where he repaired and reconditioned the figures.

In 1961, Dr. Pendergast died at the age of 81 in Terre Haute, Indiana. He was buried near his first wife, Inez Pendergast, in the Terre Haute Highland Lawn Cemetery.

Just a few years ago, Dr. Pendergast's collection of Native American artifacts was sold piece by piece on eBay. Photographs of many of these individual pieces are part of the Fairbury Echoes Museum collection.

At some point, someone donated two boxes of Dr. Pendergast's materials about cigar store Indians to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC. The museum notes that Fairbury optometrist, Dr. Anthony W. Pendergast was a collector, author, antiquarian, dealer, and authority on the subject of cigar store figures. The collection includes correspondence and newspaper clippings on Pendergast and his various folk art collections. It also has a scrapbook of photographs and miscellaneous materials relating to cigar store figures. There is also a large number of black and white pictures of figures from his personal collection, mostly for use in selling the figures. Unfortunately, Dr. Pendergast's Smithsonian collection has not yet been digitized, and can only be reviewed by visiting Washington, DC.

Dr. Pendergast preserved history in several different ways. Various new owners are preserving his collection of Native American artifacts. He saved and repaired many cigar store Indians and related figures. He sold some of his refurbished figures to the Chicago Field Museum and the Smithsonian. His legacy is his 1942 *Unusual Occupation* movie clip, his 1953 book about cigar-store figures, and his collection of information preserved by the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC.



Typical Cigar Store Indian



A.W. Pendergast standing next to the metal Indian. Mr. Pendergast has handled 247 cigar store figures over a long period, repairing extensively a goodly portion of those that came into his possession.



Extremely rare female Indian with papoose



## **CHAPTER 71**

### **Locust Street Opera House**

#### **Fairbury's Oldest Opera House**

Before the advent of radio, television, and the Internet, Fairbury citizens were entertained by theatrical plays, bands, movies, roller skating, basketball games, and speeches by guest orators. These forms of entertainment required a large building.

One often confusing aspect of Fairbury's history is that two different buildings were both often called opera houses. The oldest of these buildings was the Fairbury Opera House located at the northwest corner of Locust and Fifth Streets. It was built in 1870 and burned down in 1974.

The other building location was at the southeast corner of Third and Maple Streets. This building was called the Central Opera House, and it was built in 1904. It burned down in 1952. Both of these buildings existed between 1904 and 1952.

The older Fairbury Opera House was located where Steidinger Meats is now located. It was a three-story building that was called several different names. It was dedicated in 1871 and was initially called the Fairbury Hall. It was built by subscription, and its members were interested in "Free Thought." It opposed the Christian religion, and the number of ninety-four was prominently displayed in the center of the arch over the stage to indicate it was built ninety-four years after the Declaration of Independence. Many prominent "free thinker" guest speakers spoke from the stage at the north end of the second floor. A regular meeting was held every Sunday.

A temperance movement is a social movement against the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Participants in the movement typically criticize alcohol intoxication or promote complete abstinence, with leaders emphasizing alcohol's harmful effects on health, personality, and family life. Usually, the campaign encourages alcohol education as well as demands for new laws against the selling of alcohol, or those regulating

the availability of alcohol, or those completely prohibiting it. In different years, Fairbury had vigorous temperance movements. Some of these movements led to Fairbury being voted a "dry" town for a few years.

The Pantagraph archives have four different references to Fairbury Hall in the years between 1876 and 1878. In 1876, J. W. Strevell of Pontiac gave a speech about government financial policies. A week later, C. C. Strawn gave a rebuttal speech at the Fairbury Hall.

In 1877, the Knight Templars had a strawberry and ice-cream festival at Fairbury Hall. They had a large attendance, which raised funds for this social club. Later that year, a blind preacher named Rev. T. W. Fleming delivered a temperance lecture at Fairbury Hall. The audience was a large one.

In 1878, Horace Hurlburt, a noted temperance lecturer, entertained the people at Fairbury Hall on both Tuesday and Wednesday evenings.

Fairbury Hall next became known as the Opera House, either the Fairbury Opera House or the DuBois Opera House. Entertainment in the form of performances and dances were held on the second floor.

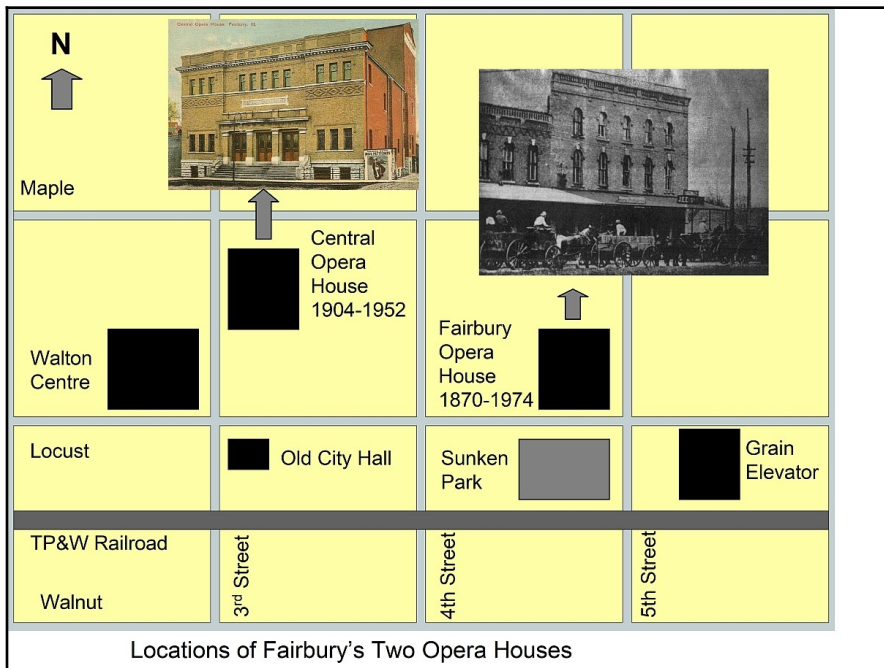
The Bon Ton drug store was located just west of what is now the Langstaff building. This drug store sponsored an adult basketball team called the Bon Ton Limits. Their home games were played on the second floor of this opera house. One of their most entertaining games was played against the Boston Bloomers, a women's basketball team in 1914. Carl Goudy, who was an early world-class motorcycle racer, and John Joda, whom the American Legion post is named after, were some of the players on the Bon Ton Limits.

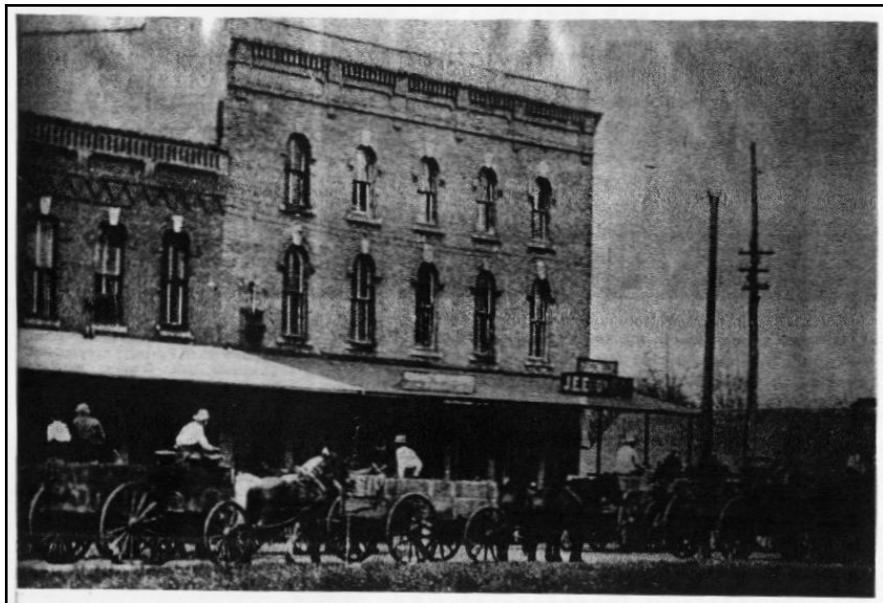
Over the years, many different businesses occupied the first floor of this opera house. Some of these businesses included T.A. Beach's hardware, Charles Bradley's dry goods, N.L. Wann's clothing, Nussbaum Brothers, Sanitary Cleaning Works, Perlee's grocery, Plympton's dry goods, W.J. Bethard, Keller's Model Grocery, Henry Meyer grocery, Sam Greedy grocery, Baker meat market, the dress factory, Champ Myers shoe repair, and the Chilton shoe repair shop.

In 1917, J. E. Eddy bought the building from Phil Wade and started calling it Eddy's Hall. He even had a large mural with his name painted on the side of the building. His hardware store had occupied the east room on the ground floor from the time he purchased it from T.A. Beach in 1902.

In 1945, the building was purchased by the Farmers Implement Company. Subsequent owners included C. E. Leman, Lyle Huette, and Lloyd Shoemaker. In 1955, the Shoemakers converted the opera house into a movie theatre called the Loy-Ola.

In November of 1974, a massive fire destroyed this opera house. The Fairbury Fire Department arrived at 8:20 PM on a Sunday night. They fought the blaze until Monday morning. Over 250,600 gallons of water were used to extinguish the fire. When it burned down, many Fairbury citizens fondly remembered the movies, roller skating, and exciting Bon Ton Limits basketball games they had seen at this opera house.





Oldest Fairbury Opera House at northwest corner of Fifth and  
Locust



## **CHAPTER 72**

### **Third Street Opera House**

#### **Fairbury's Third Street Opera House**

Before the advent of radio, television, and the Internet, Fairbury citizens were entertained by theatrical plays, bands, movies, roller skating, basketball games, and speeches by guest orators. These forms of entertainment required a large building.

One often confusing aspect of Fairbury's history is that two different buildings were both often called opera houses. The oldest of these buildings was the Fairbury Opera House located at the northwest corner of Locust and Fifth Streets. It was built in 1870 and burned down in 1974.

The other building location was at the southeast corner of Third and Maple Streets. This building was called the Central Opera House, and it was built in 1904. It burned down in 1952. Both of these buildings existed between 1904 and 1952.

The Third Street opera house was located where the Busey Bank is now located. From an architectural design point of view, it was one of the most elegant buildings ever built in Fairbury.

In 1902, Fairbury business leaders decided the old 1870 opera house had outlived its usefulness. They thought it was time to build a much bigger and better opera house. In 1903, Frank Churchill, a leading Fairbury businessman, started a stock subscription drive. He was able to raise \$8,500 towards building a new opera house in just a few weeks.

In July of 1903, the new stockholders held a meeting. By that time, \$12,000 had been raised. Herbert Powell was elected Chairman and N. E. Fulton Secretary. The committee chairmen appointed at that meeting were the leaders of the community. They included H. W. Pence, T. S. O. McDowell, A. B. Claudon, G. Y. McDowell, F. L. Churchill, J. W. Walton, Isaac Walton, John Mapel, Dr. J. R. Rayburn, A. D. Westervelt, W. J. Brethard, and Rev. E. S. Wilson. The stockholders moved to

incorporate the company for \$15,000. They decided the new building would be named the Central Opera House.

They purchased lots just south of the Fairbury Steam Laundry from Joe and Peter Garber. A house on those lots was moved to another location. J. K. Shook was the general contractor with the masonry work performed by Fred and Pearl Eckler of Champaign. Excavation for the basement began on September 22, 1903. The foundation was laid before cold weather arrived. The remainder of the building was completed in the Spring of 1904.

During the construction period, J. A. Patterson was working at the Blade for a salary of \$3.50 per week (\$103 in today's dollars). He quit his job at the Blade to become a wheelbarrow pusher for \$2.25 per day. After a few weeks, Charles E. Gregg, foreman at the Blade, offered to hire him back at \$5.00 per week. J. A. Patterson returned to work at the Blade.

The total construction cost of the massive new opera house was \$20,000. This cost is equivalent to \$564,000 in today's dollars. Opening night was on August 26, 1904, with Judge C. F. H. Carrithers giving the dedication address. Phil Wade was the manager, and the first show was Over Niagara Falls. R. A. Patterson was an usher for several years, and he was responsible for the south side of the balcony.

Most of the best shows on the road only played in larger towns. The managers of the Central Opera House were able to get some of these acts to come to Fairbury. These shows often brought a train carload or two of props and unique scenery with them. Some of these more exceptional shows included York State Folks, The Time-the Place-and the Girl, the Royal Chef, Under Southern Skies, the Lion and the Mouse, In the Bishop's Carriage, and the Wolf. Owen and McConnell, with their Shakespearean productions, were outstanding feature shows.

In 1921, the Central Opera House announced a new initiative. First was a three-week-long contest for the citizens of Fairbury to vote for which young local lady would star in a film made in Fairbury. Miss Irma Fitzgerald won the competition. As the winner, she got to pick which of her Fairbury friends would appear in the movie. In May of 1921, the film The Waif played two nights to standing room only crowds.

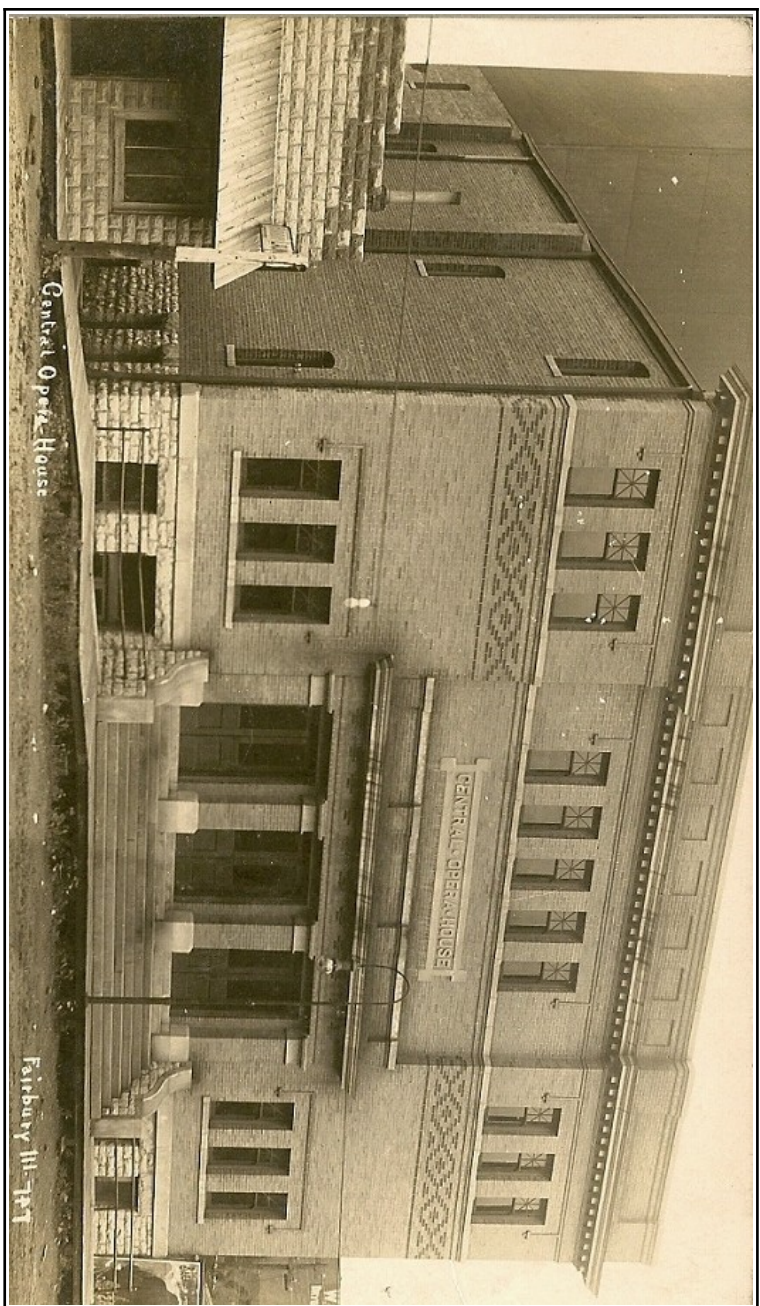
In 1912, the first silent film was played. The first "talkie" movie was viewed in 1920. In 1925, the owners of the Central Opera House decided they needed to modify their building into a movie theater. A massive new Wurlitzer pipe organ was added to have sound accompanying the movies and plays. The Wurlitzer weighed 10,000 pounds and required one complete railroad boxcar to deliver it to Fairbury. On opening night, the chief film was *The Road to Yesterday*. The comedy film *Luck of the Foolish* was also shown. A newsreel, a pipe organ overture, and song slides were also viewed. Admission was 15 cents for children and 50 cents for adults.

In August of 1927, manager E. B. Ramsey announced he had arranged for "Tommy" Dandurand and his WLS National Barn Dance Gang to make a personal appearance at the Central Theater. The WLS Barn Dance was a top-rated radio broadcast show in that era.

After Phil Wade, Charles E. Ward owned and operated this facility for several years. The Alcru Theatre company operated it for several years, as did Elmer B. Ramsey. The last owner was the A. B. McCollum chain of theaters.

In 1952, a massive fire destroyed the interior of the stone building. The building was knocked down after the blaze was extinguished. The basement rubble and the massive front steps became an eyesore. Twelve years after the fire, Howard Arnold Construction removed the remaining debris. It was transformed into a parking lot for employees and customers of Walton's Department Store. Years later, what is now the Busey Bank building was built on the site of the old opera house.

Fairbury citizens enjoyed the entertainment from the Central Opera House. Citizens were hoping the McCollum chain would rebuild after the fire. Unfortunately, they decided not to rebuild the facility. Some old photographs of the exterior and interior of the facility still exist. The only other remnant of the Central Opera House is the memories of those Fairbury citizens who saw plays or high school graduations in that beautiful building.



## CHAPTER 73

### **Polio**

#### **Title: Polio Once an Annual Scourge in Fairbury**

Polio is an infectious disease caused by the poliovirus. In about 0.5 percent of cases, there is muscle weakness resulting in paralysis. This reaction can occur over a few hours to a few days. The weakness most often involves the legs, but may less commonly include the muscles of the head, neck, and diaphragm. Many people fully recover. In those with muscle weakness, about 2 to 5 percent of children and 15 to 30 percent of adults die. Another 25 percent of people have minor symptoms such as fever and a sore throat, and up to 5 percent have headaches, neck stiffness and pains in the arms and legs. These people are usually back to normal within one or two weeks. In up to 70 percent of infections, there are no symptoms.

One of the saddest Fairbury polio stories was the case of Irvin King. In 1923, Irvin was a first-grader in Fairbury. He liked school so much he got an award for perfect attendance. In 1924, Irvin started the second grade. At the age of eight, Irvin got up one morning and had a stiff neck. Although he did not feel quite right, he walked uptown and played in the afternoon. When he laid down in the afternoon, he was never able to get up and walk again.

The disease left him extremely weak. Irvin could not sit up by himself for over a month. Both of his legs, his right arm, and his right hand were paralyzed. Irvin spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair in Fairbury.

The most nationally famous polio case occurred when then-Governor Franklin Roosevelt contracted polio at the age of 39 in 1921. His main symptoms were fever, then both of his legs became paralyzed for life. Roosevelt went on to become President of the United States. After contracting polio, he was a wheelchair user for the rest of his life.

Although polio has been around for thousands of years, the infection rate started to increase in 1940 dramatically. During the early 1900s, sanitary conditions significantly improved for children born in that era. Children

got some immunity from their mothers and often encountered the polio virus when they were young. As children were raised in more sanitary conditions, they gradually lost their resistance to the disease.

Polio cases started in the fall. Each year, mothers dreaded the start of the school year, because that is when the polio cases would begin to show up. Older children were thankful if they made it through the polio season and did not contract it, but they knew they would be at risk the next season.

Because polio attacks the nervous system, some victims had difficulty breathing. The "Iron Lung" was developed to help polio patients breathe. It was a large machine made of iron, that used a large diaphragm to help the patient breathe. Several Fairbury polio victims were treated with an Iron Lung.

After Franklin Roosevelt got polio and lost the use of his legs, he went to Warm Springs, Georgia, where people could bathe in a swimming pool fed by a warm water spring that was purported to have healing powers. Roosevelt bought the pool complex and put his law partner Basil O'Connor in charge of it.

Roosevelt wanted O'Connor to offer treatment to all polio victims in the US. O'Connor knew he had to raise a lot of money to do this. Traditionally, rich people provided all the funds for non-profit organizations. Because of the Great Depression, this source of funding had dried up. The law partner came up with the idea, rather than get money from a few wealthy people, why not get a dime from many ordinary people. O'Connor ran newspaper articles and spoke about mailing just a dime to President Roosevelt in the White House. The first campaign in 1938 raised millions of dollars. This fundraising drive became the March of Dimes annual campaigns.

In the 1940s, each year, the number of new polio victims in Livingston County was tracked. The name of each victim was published in The Blade. It was not unusual to have up to 10 new victims each year, with many of them being in Fairbury. The first mention of a Fairbury March of Dimes fundraising drive was in 1944. The annual campaigns continued into the 1960s.

Polio could also kill its victims. In 1953, 43-year-old Forrest farmer Lewis E. Hodgson died of polio. He left a wife and three young children. In 1954, Charles A. Hendershot, 26 years old, died of polio. He was not married.

The March of Dimes financially supported a young researcher, Jonas Salk, to develop a vaccine as quickly as possible. Salk finished developing a polio vaccine in 1953. The March of Dimes decided to undertake the most extensive field trial of a new medicine ever done. They inoculated two million school children for the 1954 polio season with Salk's vaccine. It would take one year before the results of the field test would be known.

The entire world was waiting to see if Salk's vaccine would end the annual scourge of polio. On April 12, 1955, the March of Dimes announced that Salk's vaccine was a success. The news was immediately broadcast by television and radio. Church bells were rung in celebration in cities all around the United States.

In May of 1955, the first Fairbury students received Salk's vaccine administered in a series of three shots. To help with the pain of the shots, Fairbury community groups bought suckers for the children to eat after they were vaccinated.

Using an alternative vaccine design, Albert Sabin developed another polio vaccine in 1962. It initially replaced Salk's vaccine because it was easier to make and administer. Two drops of Sabin's vaccine were first dropped onto a sugar cube. The patient then ate the sugar cube.

In just a few years, polio was eliminated entirely in the United States. Fortunately, today's parents and children do not know what a terrible disease polio was in the 1940s and early 1950s.

**You can help, too!**





## CHAPTER 74

### **Gypsies**

#### **Gypsies Plagued Fairbury for 100 Years**

Gypsies are technically known as the Romani peoples and are colloquially known as Roma. They originated in northwest India and then migrated to all of Europe, starting around 512 AD. The most distinguishing feature of the gypsies is that they are a nomadic or itinerant people who are continuously traveling. In England, gypsies are often called travelers. The gypsies migrated from Europe to America in the 19th century. Today there are an estimated 10 million gypsies in Europe and one million in the United States.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, gypsies in Illinois traveled in colorfully painted horse-drawn wagons. Their clothing was also very colorful. Caravans of the gypsy's traveled from one town to the next. The gypsy women would often go door to door begging for food. The women also did fortune-telling. After the fortune was read and the customer paid a small fee, the fortune-teller would steal all the money in the purse or wallet.

Gypsy men would often offer horse trades. If the customer did not like the terms of the deal, the gypsies would sometimes threaten to burn the farmer's barn or poison his animals. Gypsies also offered to do odd jobs. The gypsy observed where the customer kept his cash when the customer paid the bill. Later, the gypsy would steal all the money.

The first mention of gypsies in the Bloomington Pantagraph occurred back in 1878. A band of gypsies was camped near Bloomington. Mrs. Bramble's son had been seen talking to the gypsies quite often. When the gypsy camp left Bloomington, her son went missing. Mrs. Bramble followed the gypsy camp to Danville. She questioned the gypsies, and they said her son was not with them. The gypsies believed he had gone to Decatur.

In February of 1882, the Gibson City Courier published an article about Mrs. Rockhold in Fairbury. A gypsy fortune-teller cheated Mrs. Rockhold out of \$150. This amount would be equivalent to \$4,023 in today's dollars.

The Blade reported that a band of gypsies camped at the corners west of Wing in July of 1888. The gypsies were trading horses and telling fortunes to all who were foolish enough to deal with a gypsy.

In June of 1900, the Pantagraph reported a company of gypsy beggars visited the town of Normal. The gypsy women begged for food and money. The women often represented themselves as poor widows, with many children trying to make their way to a faraway relative that would care for them. The gypsy men lounged around their wagons parked on Linden Street. After the women returned with arm-loads of bread, meat, and butter, the caravan moved on to Bloomington.

In September of 1902, the Blade recounted that a large camp of gypsies was located just outside of town for several weeks. The gypsy women would visit the area farms and beg for food. The authorities tried to drive them away but only succeeded in making them move a little further from their old camp each time. Fairbury citizens were puzzled about why the gypsies were staying so long in one location.

The reason why the gypsies had stayed so long became clear when Livingston County Deputy Sheriff J. W. Morris returned from Indiana with a man and a 16-year-old young woman. The gypsy man had earlier eloped with the sister of his wife. When the Sheriff first arrived at the gypsy camp with the two missing people, the wife of the man and the wife's mother both fainted when they saw them. The man returned to his wife and two children. The 16-year-old was placed under the custody of one of the older women in the camp. The painted wagons and caravan then left the Fairbury area.

In October of 1906, the Blade published a gypsy story that took place in the southern Illinois town of Carmi. Gus Mitchell, a gypsy, swore out a warrant that a rival band of gypsies had stolen \$1,000 from him. Sheriff Grisson took a dozen heavily armed deputies and went to search the opposing gypsy camp. Sheriff Grisson found \$50,000 in gold and currency plus bank certificates of deposit. \$50,000 would be equivalent to \$1.44 million in today's dollars.

Everyone faced hard times during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Blade archives are full of stories about various gypsy robberies in Central Illinois during the Great Depression. One particularly interesting story took place at a Decatur bank in May of 1931. A group of colorfully dressed gypsies entered the bank. They distracted the bank teller with their flashy costumes and exaggerated gestures. One of the gypsies used a mechanical hand that was concealed in her clothing. The mechanical hand would shoot out a great distance, and a hook on the end would catch and retrieve a package of \$10 bills. Authorities arrested two of the gypsy women and took them to the caravan. The gypsy leader paid the authorities the \$500 that was stolen and \$400 court costs in exchange for dropping charges against the women.

The most significant theft from a Fairbury resident by a gypsy occurred in June of 1982. Willis Harris Sr., who was 80 years of age, hired two gypsy men and a boy to repair his roof. After the job was completed, Harris went to his bedroom and removed \$200 from a small case to pay the bill. He left approximately \$6,000 in the case. This money was the life savings of Mr. Harris and would be equivalent to \$16,100 in today's dollars.

After the gypsy men left, Mr. Harris checked his cash box and found it to be empty. The police were called, but the money was never recovered. One of the workers standing outside the house watched Mr. Harris go to the bedroom to get the cash. That worker then slipped into the house and stole all the money.

There are no known gypsy theft cases in Fairbury after the 1980s. Most of today's gypsies live in large cities, and they no longer focus on rural areas.



Three Gypsy Wagons Heading East on Locust Street.  
Sunken Park is Just Beyond the Block Building on the Right Side.

## **Recommended Reading**

*Stuffed Clubs and Antimacassars* by Alma Lewis James.

Other Fairbury History Books by Dale C. Maley.....

*The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois*

*Fairbury, Illinois in the Civil War*

*Fairbury, Illinois, in the World Wars*

*Coal Mining in Fairbury, Illinois*

*Fairbury, Illinois Book Authors*

*Fairbury, Illinois in 1888*

*Fairbury, Illinois, from Prehistoric to Modern Times*

*Fairbury, Illinois and the 1893 Columbian Exposition*

*William T. Stackpole of Fairbury, Illinois*

*William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields*



## Author Spotlight



### **Dale C. Maley**

Dale C. Maley is President of the Livingston County Historical Society and Vice-President of the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Dale is an expert on Fairbury, Illinois, history and has written over 80 newspaper articles and 18 books about Fairbury history. Both Dale and his wife are 5th generation citizens of Fairbury.

## **Also by Dale C. Maley**

### **Fairbury History Books**

- History of Murders Committed in Fairbury, Illinois
- Fairbury, Illinois Book Authors
- Fairbury, Illinois in 1888
- Fairbury, Illinois and the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition
- Fairbury, Illinois History Stories
- Coal Mining in Fairbury, Illinois
- William T. Stackpole of Fairbury, Illinois
- Livingston County Historical Society: It's Beginning and Some Later Updates
- William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields
- Fairbury, Illinois, from Prehistoric Times to Modern Times

### **Woodworking Books**

- How to Build a Fascinating Ratcheting Wood Model
- How to Make a Simple Hopping Bunny Rabbit Pull-Toy



## **Investing Books**

- Index Mutual Funds: How to Simplify Your Financial Life and Beat the Pro's
- How Asset Allocation Can Help You Achieve Your Financial Goals
- Frequently Asked Questions & Answers about ETF's and Index Funds
- Why We Don't Save Enough for Retirement and How You Can Save More
- Are You Using the Right Rules to Plan Your Retirement?
- How to Use Psychology to Achieve Your Financial Goals
- Should Immediate Annuities Be a Tool in Your Retirement Planning Toolbox?
- Who Wins the Variable Annuity Versus Mutual Fund Battle?
- Will Your Children or Uncle Sam Inherit Your Estate?
- What Are the Requirements for Becoming a Financial Planner?
- Sell My Stocks Before the Baby Boomers Crash the Market?
- How Do I Determine If I Have Saved Enough to Retire?
- Don't Max Out My 401K?
- Will Reverse Mortgages Be the Salvation of Baby Boomer Retirees?

- Do I Need Ten, Twenty, or Thirty Times My Income to Retire?
- How to Find a Good Financial Planner
- Total Market or Slice-n-Dice for My Investment Portfolio?
- What Safety Factor Are You Using for Your Retirement Plan?
- How Much Income Do I Really Need in Retirement?
- What Lessons Can We Learn from the Crash of 2008?
- How to Invest for Retirement after the Crash of 2008
- Rules-of-thumb or Retirement Planning Software?
- Is Portfolio Rebalancing Worth It?
- Do I Need Umbrella Insurance?
- Got My First Job and How Do I Handle the 401K?
- Are Black Swans Really Harmful to Ordinary Investors?
- Should My Asset Allocation Include My Pension and Social Security?
- Should I Pay Off My Mortgage Early?
- How Does My Asset Allocation Compare to Everyone Else?
- How Do I Maximize Retirement Income From My Portfolio?
- Is Saving 10% of My Gross Income Good Enough?

- Contribute to My Bad 401K or Go Taxable?
- Do I Need an Investment Policy Statement?
- Do I Need Long-Term Care Insurance?
- Do I Need Long-Term Disability Insurance?
- How to Read Your Way to Financial Wealth
- How Do I Select the Correct Risk Level for My Portfolio?
- How Do I Estimate Retirement Living Expenses?